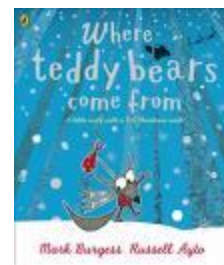


The last set of Book Notes reviews for 2009 considers an eclectic mix of titles that have arrived during the past few months. Some books include aspects of the holiday season that many people celebrate this time of year. Friendship, love, kindness appear in books with subjects as diverse as applesauce, a bear on a roller coaster, and Christmas. Other titles deal with how people deal with losses dealt by war, natural disasters, and death. Then there are some books that stimulate curiosity and imagination whether learning about dinosaurs or solving literary riddles. Whatever books you have enjoyed in 2009, we know you share our anticipation of discovering what titles the new year will bring.

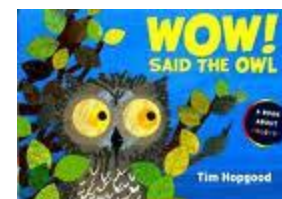
## Picture Books

Deep in the woods, a small gray wolf has trouble sleeping. After he decides the answer to his insomnia is a teddy bear, he sets out on a quest to discover *Where Teddy Bears Come from* (Peachtree). As he journeys through the forest, the little wolf meets characters who have had unfortunate encounters with other wolves in the past. For example, his ill-timed sneeze arouses the suspicions of the Three Little Pigs, who are convinced that the big bad wolf has returned to blow down their house. He doesn't fare much better with Little Red Riding Hood and her granny. Tired and discouraged, the little wolf happens upon an old man with a long white beard who needs help pumping up the tire of his red truck. The little wolf's huffing and puffing are rewarded the next morning when he finds a soft, cuddly teddy bear at the foot of his bed. Children old enough to understand Mark Burgess's references to other fairy tales will gain special enjoyment from the story, but younger children can savor the text on its own merits. Russell Ayto's illustrations include visual clues about some of the background stories, as when reindeer peek from behind trees while the bearded man tries to deal with the flat tire. Different sizes and styles of type add movement and visual interest to this delightful production.—KP



Elizabeth O. Dulemba weaves Spanish words and phrases into her story of a young boy's trip to the store to buy *Soap, Soap, Soap* (Raven Tree). Along the way, he lands in a mud puddle, angers a woman who had dropped her grocery bag, and encounters a bully. He gets increasingly dirty before he arrives at his destination to buy the jabon he desperately needs. Once he returns home, Mama quickly gets him into the tub to use the purchase. Dulemba includes a vocabulary list at the end of the story, but the meaning is clear, particularly because her expressive illustrations help convey what is happening every step of the way. A good choice for reading before bathtime.—KP

Tim Hopgood's bright illustrations introduce children to a variety of colors in *Wow! Said the Owl* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). A curious little owl decides to nap during the night so she can see what happens during the day. What a different world from the browns and grays of night she usually observes! The bright yellow sun, lacy white clouds, and shimmering red butterflies delight her. Even the background colors change on the illustrations. A field of bright orange flowers with green foliage extends over two pages with warm yellow-gold backgrounds. An unexpected shower is



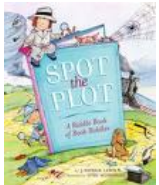
followed by a vibrant rainbow. However, the owl decides the stars are the most beautiful sight of all and returns to the usual routine of staying awake at night. Preschoolers who are learning colors will enjoy identifying the various hues on the pages and following little owl through her explorations.—KP



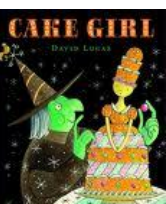
Venezuelan author Kurusa sets her animal story on the African savanna in *Lom and the Gnatters* (Groundwood). Lom the lion has terrible problems with his itchy mane. Soldier Bird diagnoses the trouble as Gnatters, who have taken up residence in the tangled mess. Lom resists having the mane combed until he can no longer stand the itchiness.

Unfortunately, by that point, the mane is so knotted that a comb cannot get through, and the lovely red mane needs to be cut. Lom is horrified when he looks at his reflection in a pool of water and realizes that he looks more like a porcupine than a lion. Hiding in his cave, the only solace he has is that the Gnatters have left. Of course, his mane does grow back eventually. A baby porcupine who “adopts” Lom as his mother makes sure that regular combing keeps the Gnatters far away. Isabel Ferrer’s illustrations add humor to the story. Her close up views of the Gnatters having a wonderful time in the mane are particularly funny. They first fly in with suitcases and picnic baskets and later feast on the breadcrumbs and organize a party. Although the book’s format is a little small for sharing with a large group, two or three children will enjoy hearing the story read aloud.—KP

*Spot the Plot* by J. Patrick Lewis is filled with cleverly written riddles that make reference to 13 famous childhood stories (Chronicle). As each riddle is explored, the reader or listener will find humor in Lewis’ strategies of hinting about favorite characters. “A magical telling, a pig for the selling, a spider is spelling out words that amaze. Do you know this spider, this spiderweb writer?” If words like this don’t give you enough clues to solve this riddle then the pictures are sure to help. Lynn Munsinger does a spectacular job accompanying the written humor with detailed illustrations. Long blond hair flows out of the Rapunzel book, Dorothy’s house is taken away in a twister with a sign welcoming you to Kansas, and Pinocchio’s nose is longer than ever. Lewis doesn’t just touch on the classic stories but includes modern day favorites like the *Polar Express* and *The Story of Ferdinand*. Parents, teachers, or friends will enjoy figuring out each riddle and reminiscing about their experiences with these stories. —GT



When a despondent witch feels sad because she is alone on her birthday once again, she creates a lovely *Cake Girl* to help her celebrate (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). The witch commands her new servant to sing, dance, and do the housework before revealing that she intends to eat the cake girl when the chores are done. The clever girl suggests that kindness might bring the witch the friends she craves. She even provides lessons once the witch admits she has no idea how to go about being kind. Following the cake girl’s instructions, the witch not only helps with the housework but also sings, dances, smiles, and laughs. Using her magic, she transforms herself and the cake girl into many things, including fireworks and birds. They finally settle down before the fireplace as a witch armchair with a splendid cat on her lap. David Lucas’s text and illustrations feature many magical and amusing touches, including numerous jack-o-lanterns with varying expressions. The fun of the story shouldn’t be limited to Halloween, however.—KP



Cooking together is a family adventure in *Applesauce Season* by Eden Ross Lipson (Roaring Brook). The process begins at the farmers’ market, where varieties of apples change throughout the fall. Paula Red, Jonagold, Macoun, Baldwin, Northern Spy are



some of the selections available as the season progresses. The differences in taste and texture mean that no two batches of applesauce will be alike. The process of transforming six pounds of fruit into a delicious sauce doesn't vary, however, and the narrator works in the kitchen with his mother and grandmother to produce the delicious treat. From cutting board to kettle to food mill, apples undergo a transformation. Daddy cooks dishes such as potato pancakes and crepes that complement applesauce, but the family eats it in all sorts of ways plain and fancy. Mordicai Gerstein depicts the happy sharing with neighbors and family members gathering around a large dining room table to enjoy the bounty. Of course, there are other ways to eat apples too, including apple pie, which had been Grandpa's favorite dessert. As the boy daydreams of the future, he envisions trips to the farmers' market with his own daughter, ready to carry on the tradition. Perceptive viewers will enjoy some of Gerstein's subtle touches in his illustrations, such as the St. Bernard puppy that appears on many pages and emerges as a full-grown dog in the vision of the future. Of course, Lipson provides an applesauce recipe that readers can try themselves—with adult help.—KP



It's hard to say which aspect of *The Spirit of Christmas* is the most endearing (Macmillan). It might be Nancy Tillman's illustrations of sparkling snowflakes and crystal bright bulbs. It might be the fact that the spirit of Christmas himself is revealing every joy this season offers and slipping his portrait in each page to find. Or perhaps the holiday verses placed in some of the pictures will remind the reader of merry times. If none of those aspects touch your heart, then the message at the end is sure to move you.

"Remember, this all began with a child. Because it took nothing but love to begin it, it's not Christmas if love isn't in it." The character in the book realizes the best part of Christmas is his child. The closing includes a compilation of all the parts of Christmas that make it special, including a child dancing around the tree. Nancy Tillman writes her stories with the intention of giving children a sense that they are loved. There is also a Spirit of Christmas audio version read by Grammy winner Jim Dale, the Harry Potter audiobook voice, and featuring Christmas carols performed by the St. Paul's Children's Choir. —GT

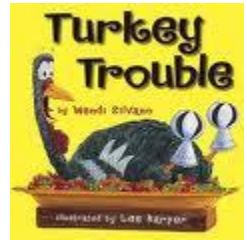
People of all ages find enjoyment in the challenge of figuring out a riddle. School children Rachel and Jacob are no different, and in this retold Jewish folktale they try to outdo each other in solving the toughest riddles. From the moment *Clever Rachel* was born, her father told her riddles (Orca). Jacob boasted about being the smartest but was told Rachel was even smarter. Thinking no girl could ever outwit him, Jacob and Rachel got into a riddle Olympiad. Suddenly a distraught woman, desperately looking for the clever girl, interrupted them with three riddles to solve. This time the riddles really were difficult, and neither Rachel nor Jacob could solve them...independently. The experience of trying to solve the women's riddles proves to both how clever the other is and that there can be two clever children in town. Author Debby Waldman pairs up with talented illustrator Cindy Revell, creating a delightful story in which readers will like figuring out the riddles with Rachel and Jacob. Additional riddles are included for further enjoyment. —GT



Bear and his friends return for another adventure in Michael Rosen's *Bear Flies High* (Bloomsbury). This time the group of children convince Bear that leaping off dunes at the beach isn't the best way to try to fly. Instead, they lead him to an amusement park, where they have plenty of room to run around and whoop as loudly as they want. However, it is at the top of the roller coaster that Bear can really fly like a bird with a "Swoopy swoop/ Swoopy swoop/ Swoopy swoopy swoop." As the sun goes down, the friends all head

back to the beach to watch birds in the sky and practice swooping themselves as the sun turns the sky shades of orange and red. Adiran Reynolds' energetic illustrations reinforce the fast pace. The repetition will have listeners chanting along during a second reading if not the first.—KP

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, the main character of Wendi Silvano's picture book knows there is bound to be *Turkey Trouble* (Marshall Cavendish). Farmer Jake and his son are on the lookout for the barnyard gobbler as they think about the Thanksgiving menu. Turkey decides his only chance to escape is to disguise himself as another farm animal. Each of his clever costumes brings him close to the mark, but he just can't quite blend in with the cows, pigs, or sheep. When he realizes that rooster might be substituted as the main course, Turkey comes up with the best plan yet—pizza! Lee Harper's renditions of Turkey's various disguises generate a lot of visual fun. Even preschoolers will know that Turkey will somehow manage to escape the roasting pan, but they probably won't guess what plan will work.—KP



### Young Adult Fiction

At first glance, Catherine Austin's novel *Walking Backwards* is rather depressing (Orca). It is, after all, about the grieving process of a young family whose mother has just died in a car accident. The novel's timeframe is concentrated in the few months after the mother's death. Each family member reacts in his own way. The father withdraws emotionally. The young boy Sammy develops severe phobias of snakes and cars because the mother drove off the road when a snake in her car startled her. He talks to a toy Power Ranger as though it's his mother. Sammy's older brother Josh is the book's narrator. He tries to take care of his brother, feels guilty about still enjoying soccer, worries that his mother will win a Darwin award for dying in a "stupid" way and seeks someone to blame for the accident. It is Josh's voice that makes this novel work. He is entirely convincing as a smart, sensitive twelve-year-old, and his behavior fits his age. While *Walking Backwards* could make an imaginative child worry about the safety of his or her parents, it will resonate with those who have experienced a loss, even one not as traumatic as the loss of a mother, and its gentle portrayal of the stages of grief will strike a chord with those who are starting to think about the big questions of life and death and loss. —HE

Deborah Ellis's novels *The Breadwinner*, *Parvana's Journey* and *Mud City* have won a number of prominent awards for their portrayal of strong, smart girls in Afghanistan and (in the last novel) Pakistan—and deservedly so (Groundwood). Ellis does a good job making the novels about the children and not about politics. The 9/11 attacks are only mentioned fleetingly once near the end. The message is the horrible effect war has on children, no matter who is fighting or what they are fighting for. These novels give faces and names to Afghan children and allow an emotional connection that no dry list of numbers could ever provide. Now the three novels are available in one book under the title *The Breadwinner Trilogy*. Given the continuity of characters across the novels, this move makes a certain amount of sense. At the end of *The Breadwinner*, readers want to know what's next for Parvana and Shauzia. Having all three stories together also helps drive home the message that no one group is responsible for the suffering in Afghanistan and brings readers through time from Taliban control of the country to bombing against the Taliban by the US and its allies. There is also a brief informational note about Afghanistan and a short glossary at the end of the book. However, these are not lighthearted stories, so some readers may find all three too much to take on at once. As with the individual release of these titles, the subject matter is too much for young children. But while *The Breadwinner Trilogy* is



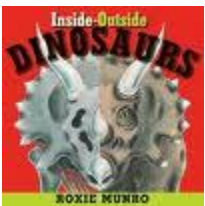
certainly not light or particularly fast to read, thoughtful students of junior high on up will get a lot out of it. –HE

Hannah is having a hard time adjusting to the loss of her boyfriend. She blames herself for not stopping him from getting in the car before the fatal crash. People at school ask her if she's the girl with the dead boyfriend. And to top it all off an allergic reaction to her first bee sting sends her into an out of body experience. Thinking she's headed to heaven, she sees and hears her boyfriend, who tells her she must go back and do something important. *Hannah's Touch* now gives her the power to heal people's wounds (Orca). She starts to wonder why she was given this ability and what her boyfriend wanted her to do. But when she realizes the person she's really supposed to help is the person she hates most, she's not interested. Tom, the driver of the car her boyfriend died in, has more problems than anyone at school knows, and Hannah is the only person that can help him. Laura Langston writes about real life tragedy with a supernatural twist, told in a teenage voice which young adult readers will relate to and appreciate. –GT

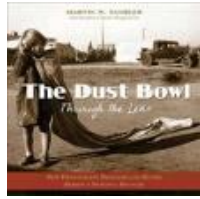
Author Ching Yeung Russell tells some of her own experiences as a young writer in *Tofu Quilt* (Lee & Low). The free-verse poetry book in journal format describes the childhood of Yeung Ying who receives encouragement from her mother and doubt from everyone else about her in pursuit of a career in writing. The story starts out with five year old Yeung playing with her cousins during a carefree summer at Uncle Five's home. Raised in China, Yeung is told that boys should be the only ones going to school past the primary grades, and girls should grow up to "listen to their husbands." But it is the continued encouragement and defense of her mother and seventh-grade teacher who help her keep her dream of writing a reality. "He sees the talent of a writer- something far beyond the saleslady I thought I had to be." The journal trails off with Yeung writing of the world around her. This story speaks to those who are surrounded by criticism for going after what they most love by showing us a girl achieving success. Since we are left with Yeung Ying just starting out as a writer at age twelve, it would be nice to see a continuation of her journey. Especially interesting is the way she describes her aunts and uncles by using numbers according to their birth order such as Uncle Five, and Auntie Seven. The Chinese customs and language filtered throughout this book are explained in the glossary at the end. –GT

### Non-Fiction

Budding paleontologists will delight in Roxie Munro's look *Inside-Outside Dinosaurs* (Marshall Cavendish). The oversize format features one double-page spread of a dinosaur's skeleton, followed by a second double-page full-color illustration of what the dinosaur might have looked like when it was alive. These "outside" views include animals that lived during the same era. Smaller versions of the pictures appear at the end of the book, where Munro offers information about the main dinosaur and an identification key with the names of the other animals in the background. Suggested books and websites will lead young dinosaur lovers to more information about their favorite animals.—KP



Martin Sandler offers insights into a bleak era of United States History in *The Dust Bowl Through the Lens* (Walker). Years of over-farming followed by severe drought resulted in devastating losses of topsoil that blew away in huge black clouds, taking livelihoods and erasing hope. When the entire national economy faltered, Franklin Roosevelt led the government in creating agencies such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Farm Security Administration (FSA). Among the millions of people employed under various WPA programs were photographers, some of whom set out to document the plight of the farmers who migrated to California and those who remained to eke out an existence on the Great Plains. Sandler uses their photographs to illustrate his discussion of the era, including how the images helped shaped public opinion, especially through the new medium of the photo-essay. Towering dust storms, ravaged landscapes, stoic migrants, and weary farmers are among the images that offer insights into the past for history students in middle school and junior high.—KP



Alan Schroeder weaves historical details into his account of the early years of a little-known artist of the Harlem Renaissance. The picture book biography, *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage* (Lee & Low), offers a portrait of a hard-working and resilient artist. Born in Florida in 1892, Savage molded clay figures from the time she was a child. However, her preacher father considered the activity a waste of time and demanded that she study the Bible instead of playing. In fact, he considered the small figures profane, “and if he found one, he would crush it to dust.” When she was 15, Savage met a potter who recognized her talent and provided her with encouragement as well as clay. The principal of her school arranged for her to give lessons to other students. The pay she received for that work, plus her mother’s intervention on her behalf, finally convinced her father to let her pursue her art. After she won \$25 in a county fair competition, she was able to travel to New York, where she gained entrance to Cooper Union School. She was 27. Although the picture book account ends there, a two-page afterword provides information about what happened next in her education and career. Schroeder notes although that her artistic success was short-lived, in the 1930s she exerted her influence as both an artist and teacher.—KP



**Book Reviews written by:**

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

GT—Gretchen Turner, CCYAB Graduate Assistant pursuing a master's degree in Library Media Science

HT—Heather Elliot, a second year MFA student in Creative Writing

**Books Reviewed in this issue:**

Austen, Catherine. *Walking Backward*. Orca, 2009. ISBN 9781554691470. \$9.95.

Burgess, Mark. *Where Teddy Bears Come From*. Peachtree, 2009. ISBN 9781561454877. \$16.95.

Dulemba, Elizabeth. *Soap Soap Soap*. Raven Tree, 2009. ISBN 9781934960622. \$16.95.

Ellis, Deborah. *The Breadwinner Trilogy*. Groundwood, 2009. ISBN 9780888999597. \$16.95.

Hopgood, Tim. *Wow! Said the Owl*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. ISBN 9780374385187. \$14.95.

Kurusa. *Lom and the Gnatters*. Groundwood, 2009. ISBN 9780888999443. \$18.95.

Langston, Laura. *Hannah's Touch*. Orca, 2009. ISBN 9781554691494. \$9.95.

Lewis, J. Patrick. *Spot the Plot*. Chronicle, 2009. ISBN 9780811846684. \$15.99.

Lipson, Eden. *Applesauce Season*. Roaring Brook, 2009. ISBN 9781596432161. \$17.99.

Lucas, David. *Cake Girl*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. ISBN 9780374399092. \$15.95.

Munro, Roxie. *Inside-Outside Dinosaurs*. Marshall Cavendish, 2009. ISBN 9780761456247. \$17.99.

Rosen, Michael. *Bear Flies High*. Bloomsbury, 2009. ISBN 9781599903866. \$16.99.

Russell, Ching Yeung. *Tofu Quilt*. Lee & Low, 2009. ISBN 9781600604232. \$16.95.

Sandler, Martin. *The Dust Bowl*. Walker, 2009. ISBN 9780802795472. \$19.99.

Schroeder, Alan. *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage*. Lee & Low, 2009. ISBN 9781600603327. \$19.95.

Silvano, Wendi. *Turkey Trouble*. Marshall Cavendish, 2009. ISBN 9780761455295. \$15.99.

Tillman, Nancy. *The Spirit of Christmas*. Macmillan, 2009. ISBN 9780312549657. \$16.99.

Waldman, Debby. *Clever Rachel*. Orca, 2009. ISBN 9781554690817. \$19.95.