

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

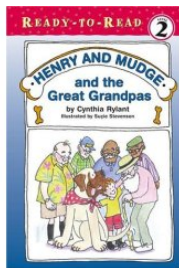
Minnesota State University, Mankato

February 2006

When the American Library Association announced award-winning books for children and young adults published in 2005, a new category had been added to the list of winners and honor books. For the first time, the Theodore Seuss Geisel Award was presented to “the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished contribution to the body of American children’s literature known as beginning reader books published in the United States during the preceding year.”

Because we have the medal winner and three of the four honor books in the CCYAB, we want to begin this issue of Book Notes by highlighting these titles. According to the ALA website, the Geisel Award recognizes the accomplishments of those “who demonstrate great creativity and imagination in . . . literary and artistic achievements to engage children in reading.” The four books in our collection meet these standards.

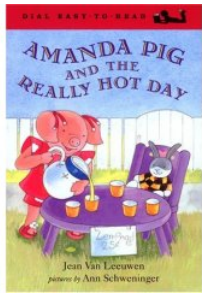
The 2006 medal winner is Henry and Mudge and the Great Grandpas, written by Cynthia Rylant and illustrated by Suec Stevenson (Simon & Schuster). Since 1987, Henry and his over-sized dog Mudge have entertained children who are starting to read on their own. It’s strange to



realize that some of the first readers of the series might now have children of their own even though Henry and Mudge haven’t aged much at all. In this volume, Henry, his parents, and Mudge visit Great-Grandpa Bill, who lives in a large house with four other old men. After Mudge and Henry discover a swimming pond, all the grandpas want to go for a swim. Henry’s dad accompanies the group while his mom prepares a spaghetti dinner. Although

the situation may seem romanticized for adult readers who have dealt with living arrangements for their aging relatives, beginning readers probably won’t realize the improbable plot elements. Perhaps this medal includes some unstated recognition of “lifetime achievement” for a series that has provided high quality beginning readers for almost two decades. (KP)

One of the honor books is the latest in another long-running series. Amanda Pig and the Really Hot Day by Jean Van Leeuwen and illustrated by Ann Schweninger (Dial) captures a child's



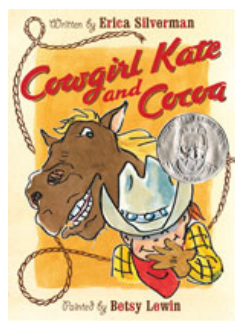
experience of what it's like to try to have fun when it's sweltering outside. Van Leeuwen's lively prose and Schweninger's charming and simple illustrations work together in this book to create playful stories for young readers. It is such a hot day that Amanda Pig says, "I am hot and sticky and drippy and droopy." Even her hair ribbons are hot! Amanda tries to join the boys who are making a fort, sets up a lemonade stand, and finally ends up sitting outside on a blanket with her family at night while her father tells a cool story. The trials and tribulations Amanda faces will resonate with readers of all ages. (TS)

Honor book, A Splendid Friend, Indeed, (Boyd's Mills) written and illustrated by Suzanne

Bloom, features an ongoing exchange between Bear, who wants to read and think quietly, and Goose, who can't stop talking. Although Bear doesn't say much in words, expressive body language and facial expressions tell a story themselves. From the first double-page spread with Goose tiptoeing down a furry slope, the reader is intrigued by the unlikely juxtaposition of two animals who don't seem to



have much in common. Despite their differences, they can both proclaim to each other that "You are my splendid friend." (KP)



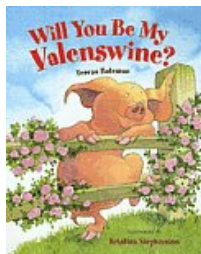
A third honor book, Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa by Erica Silverman and illustrated by Betsy Lewin (Harcourt), highlights the relationship between a girl and her horse. Silverman's spare and humorous prose perfectly complements Lewin's mastery of line and brush strokes to create stories that dance on the page. Cowgirl Kate is "a cowgirl from the boots up," and Cocoa, is "a cowhorse from the mane down." When Cowgirl Kate tries to get Cocoa to go to sleep or to herd the cows, she is patient. When Cowgirl Kate climbs a tree, Cocoa worries about her and has her sit on his back. After reading the four chapters, which are short stories in their lives, kids will discover the two are more than just a cowgirl and a pet; they are best friends. Those who want to read more adventures about the two will be happy to learn that a sequel, Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa: Partners, has arrived in the CCYAB recently. (TS)

During February, many libraries feature books about love and friendship in connection with Valentine's Day. Barbara Samuels offers a new twist on a familiar theme with Happy Valentine's Day, Dolores (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux). Although the story revolves around a particular holiday, the lesson Dolores learns can be applied year round. She simply can't stop



snooping in the bedroom of her older sister Faye. Despite Faye's repeated requests and warnings, Dolores can't resist peeking into a dresser drawer after she sees Faye hide a small box. Inside the container is a Valentine's Day necklace with a small frog that croaks a tune when someone pushes a button on its tummy. One mishap leads to another until Dolores has to take all her savings to purchase a replacement in an attempt to hide her snooping from Faye. The humorous illustrations reinforce the outlandish situations in which Dolores finds herself, and the variety of page layouts keeps the plot moving, even for readers who must rely on illustrations to help their decoding. Of course, many of them will guess that the Valentine's Day gift is intended for Dolores, because the sisters really do care for one another despite their bickering. (KP)

Another humorous look at the holiday is offered in Will You Be My Valenswine?, written by



Teresa Bateman and illustrated by Kristina Stephenson (Albert Whitman). The book starts with the line, "On Valentine's Day, a little piggy began to mope and whine. For that pouting pig, named Polly, didn't have a valenswine."

Bateman's rhythmic verse and Stephenson's eye-catching illustrations show a wide range of emotion as Polly wanders around trying, but not succeeding, at finding her valenswine. Polly is rejected by a sparrow, and even the slop in the

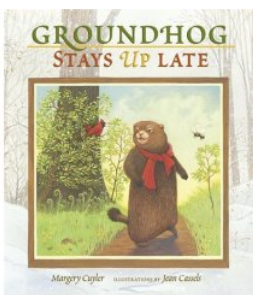
trough, all the while not noticing her valenswine may be closer than she thinks! (TS)

Older readers can also celebrate the romantic holiday. HarperCollins' The Unsigned Valentine and Other Events in the Life of Emma Meade by Johanna Hurwitz gives readers a glimpse of the day-to-day struggles in the lives of people in Jericho, Vermont, in the early 1900s. Readers follow the Meade family through the life of fifteen-year-old Emma as she quits school to help her mother with the farm chores. The simplicity and the morality of the early twentieth century comes into focus as a budding romance for young Emma and a devastating flood puts the values of people into



perspective. The reader sees varying degrees of love and sacrifice as people distinguish between their wants and their needs as they interact with faithful friends during severe winters as well as ordinary summer days. The pencil drawings by Mary Azarian recall those earlier times and evoke nostalgia for the apparent simplicity of the past. Readers will find themselves immersed in the characters and their ways of thinking in spite of struggles with obedience and respect that all young readers can identify from their own lives today. (MF)

Before Valentine's Day rolls around, February brings another holiday: Groundhog's Day. Margery Cuyler explores what might happen if the star of that event didn't cooperate in



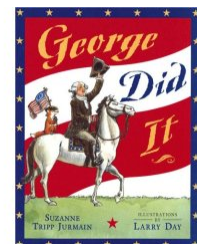
Groundhog Stays Up Late. (Walker) In autumn, while the other animals prepare to hibernate, Groundhog decides that he would rather play instead of gathering food and getting ready for winter. Although Squirrel, Bear, Badger, and others warn him that he should plan ahead, he keeps playing even when snow falls. Soon, however, he gets lonely and decides to trick his hibernating friends into emerging early.

Discovering that Groundhog had declared an end to winter on January 2 instead of February 2, they fool him on the real date of shadow viewing. Jean Cassels' gouache illustrations give the animals a somewhat idealized appearance but will work well with the picture book set.

Interesting variations in layout incorporate borders of trees that help indicate the passage of seasons. The book would definitely be a good choice for February story times. (KP)

Elementary school students who observe Presidents' Day will enjoy Suzanne Tripp Jurmain's introduction to the first U. S. President in George Did It. (Penguin) Unlike many current politicians, Washington was reluctant to take the job.

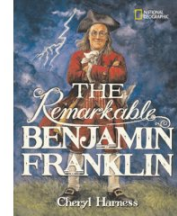
Jurmain emphasizes his contributions to the early history of the United States and his desire to return to his farm after the Revolutionary War and the adoption of the Constitution. She traces his journey from Virginia to



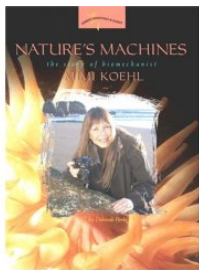
New York, during which he tried to avoid the ceremonies planned in various cities. Larry Day's illustrations add a light touch to the subject and emphasize the low-key and humble approach that Washington tried to take during the early days of the new nation. Although the book covers

only a brief period of Washington’s life, the incidents reveal a great deal about the first president. (KP)

One of Washington’s contemporaries is the subject of National Geographic’s The Remarkable Benjamin Franklin by Cheryl Harness. Her life-like illustrations and extensive research add depth to her retelling of his story and entice readers to keep turning the pages because of her refreshing approach to the highlights of this prolific inventor, scientist, writer, philosopher, and statesman. Harness follows his life from 1706, when he was born the tenth of seventeen children, to his death in 1790. She packs each page with dates, quotations, biographical details, and realistic artwork that transport readers to colonial times. She immerses readers in the events that helped shape a young country into an independent nation. While she recounts Franklin’s curiosity that led to myriad ideas like the lightning rod, bifocals, the post office, the public library, hospitals, and more, Harness shows the human side of a man who loved his family. Many of his inventions—such as the Franklin stove—helped his family live more comfortable lives. Harness concludes with a four-page timeline depicting the high points of Franklin’s life and events happening around the world during that same time. (MF)



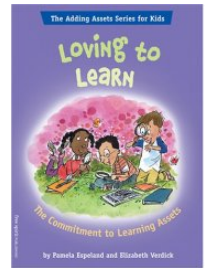
A new series from Franklin Watts (Scholastic) features biographies of women scientists for readers in upper elementary grades and middle school. For example, Nature’s Machines: The



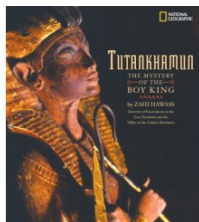
Story of Biomechanist Mimi Koehl explores the life and work of a woman who won a MacArthur Foundation fellowship because of her original and creative approaches to research. Despite her parents’ lack of enthusiasm for her pursuit of an academic career, Koehl benefited from a number of mentors, particularly in graduate school. Deborah Parks includes information about some of the scientific studies Koehl has conducted and

doesn’t minimize the hard work and challenges she faces in doing research in the field and in the laboratory. Many of her experiments involve dangerous forays into various parts of the ocean so that she can study marine creatures in their habitats. The documentation in the volumes is exemplary, noting both books and web sites appropriate for readers and some of the sources consulted by the authors while preparing the biographies. (KP)

Mimi Koehl and the other women profiled in the series share an intense desire to learn more about their chosen areas of study. “Learning assets” are the subject of a new Free Spirit book by Pamela Espeland and Elizabeth Verdick. Loving to Learn helps readers think about five assets they might acquire or strengthen, including achievement motivation and reading for pleasure. Each brief chapter begins and ends with a vignette related to the asset under discussion. For example, the “Homework” chapter describes the efforts of a brother and sister to “share homework” rather than completing assignments themselves. After each scenario, the authors provide suggestions about how the asset might be strengthened at home and school, in the neighborhood and faith community, and with friends. Then readers return to find out “the rest of the story,” as the characters put suggestions into action. The small paperback is one of a series of six titles related to the 40 Developmental Assets promoted by Search Institute, a nonprofit organization in Minneapolis. The books are designed for readers from 8 to 12 and could serve as good discussion starters if adults use them with young people to consider some of the qualities the authors are trying to promote. Perhaps some students will pursue other volumes themselves if their interest is piqued by group conversation. (KP)



The recent discovery of a new tomb in Egypt’s Valley of the Kings should help spark interest in a new title that recalls the last discovery in that region: King Tut’s tomb in 1922. In Tutankhamun: The Mystery of the Boy King, Zahi Hawass offers a compelling look at the life of the boy king from his ascension to the throne at age eight, through his early marriage, until his mysterious death at age eighteen. Hawass reconstructs the life of young King Tut through artifacts found in his tomb. The kinds of games he played, his hunting prowess, and his affection



for his young bride are glimpsed in symbolic drawings in his tomb, decorations on his throne, and pieces of clothing and footwear archeologists discovered. However, the early death of the young king remains a mystery.

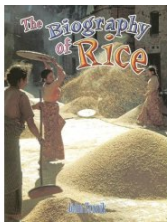
Historians know that the ancient Hittite empire defeated Egypt around the time of King Tut’s death. Scientists have found traces of the Black Plague in a dig near the Hittite empire and know that some of the prisoners the Hittites brought to their land from Egypt had a “terrible disease.” Some historians speculate that King Tut may have died from the illness. This volume exemplifies the standards of quality and thoroughness evident in many National

Geographic books. The excellent photographs and comprehensive details will intrigue young readers. (MF)

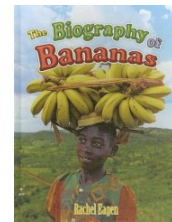
Linda Sue Park's Bee-bim Bop! will engage preschoolers from its opening pages in which mother and daughter race through the grocery store to purchase the necessary ingredients for Bee-bim bop, a traditional Korean dish. (Houghton Mifflin) When they get home, the little girl watches and describes the process of preparing meat and vegetables, all the time encouraging her mother to "Hurry, Mama, hurry" because she's "Hungry hungry hungry for some BEE-BIM BOP!" Ho Baek Lee's illustrations bring to life the little girl and her canine companion, an enthusiastic pooch that heightens the activity level in the kitchen. When the meal is finally ready, the entire family, from baby to grandmother, gathers to mix together the rice and other foods into a delicious supper. Park includes a recipe at the end of the book and carefully delineates the steps that must be undertaken by a grownup as well as which ones a child can complete. (KP)



The basis for Bee-bim bop is rice, which is a staple food item for people around the globe. John Zronik narrates The Biography of Rice as part of Crabtree's "How Did That Get Here?" series. What is particularly interesting about Zronik's book and others such as The Biography of

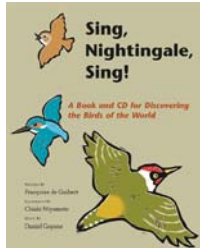


Bananas by Rachel Eagen is that they include information about the social, economic, environmental issues related to the crop under discussion. Of course, they also contain descriptions of several varieties of the commodity and explain how and where the crop is grown. Zronik discusses how slaves were used to cultivate rice in South



Carolina and Georgia, and Eagen talks about how governments in Central and South America provided tax breaks to large corporations which had a monopoly on the banana trade. The books also mention research for future development of the crops and the impact that past and current farming practices have had on the environment. In short, the series packs a lot of information into 32 pages enlivened by numerous photographs. (KP)

A recent title from Kane/Miller enriches the study of birds by including a CD with Sing, Nightingale, Sing! by Francoise de Guibert. Chiaki Miyamoto provides a small illustration to accompany a paragraph about each of 50 birds. A summary of facts about plumage, size, beak, diet, and nest follows the brief introduction. The CD includes soundtracks for each of the birds



pictured. Most are about 50 seconds long. In addition, Daniel Goyone wrote and performed a dozen compositions for piano and bird, featuring songs recorded in nature. Although not all the birds he used are pictured, the haunting melodies evoke the natural world and extend the appreciation of the feathered animals that can be found in garden, forest, pond, and mountains. (KP)

Is your child having nightmares? The Dream Jar, a picture book written by Lindan Lee Johnson and illustrated by Serena Curmi, is the perfect answer (Houghton Mifflin). Johnson’s imaginative but practical approach to nightmares comes to life with Curmi’s whimsical, vibrant, and energetic illustrations. Johnson tells the story of a young girl who is having nightmares.

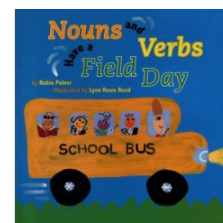


The girl enlists the help of her sister, who sleeps in the same room. The sister solves the problem through a series of imaginative steps. The girl is told to turn her bad dreams into “dreamy dreams.” She follows the advice and turns the scary sea monsters into silly ones. When the girl’s sister has to leave for a slumber party, she panics, but her sister has left a dream jar behind. This book takes a creative approach to a common fear and illustrates a wonderful relationship where sisters share a “just-between-sisters-yawn,” and a “just-between-sisters-smile.” (TS)

Of course, you’d expect to find birds, animals, and children enjoying outdoor activities, but parts of speech? In Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day by Robin Pulver, Holiday House brings readers a lighthearted look at sentence construction that makes learning

fun and stimulating. When Mr. Wright declares a field day for his students, the nouns and verbs on the blackboards decide to have fun, too.

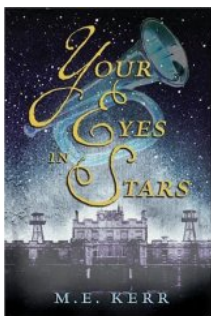
They form teams: verbs with verbs, nouns with nouns, and pronouns with pronouns. However, they can’t play any games because they have



forgotten their jobs. When they recall their functions, they discover, “Things happen when we work together.” Lynn Rowe Reed’s charming illustrations depict the wonder of words and the

unparalleled joy of children by using bright colors and simple drawings to reinforce the fun. Young readers will delight in the enchantment of words coming to life to create sentences. (MF)

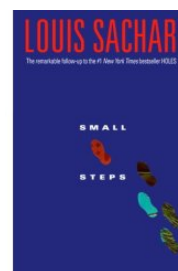
Although this issue of Book Notes began with books for beginning readers, we'll conclude with a couple longer novels by prolific authors. M. E. Kerr's Your Eyes in Stars, relates a story of



two high school girls, Jessica and Elise—each a misfit in her own way—and how their short friendship results in a life-long pact. (HarperCollins) Incredibly, a twenty-one-year-old convict on The Hill—“a lifer”—influences their friendship and seals their separation by an incident he causes one Halloween. Jessica and Elise—bonded by secrets and the throes of first loves—are torn apart, not only by that Halloween incident, but by their parents and World War II which separates them by a

continent and an ideology. In spite of letters and pledges of forever-friendship, their story has a bittersweet quality. Young adult readers will recognize their own secret selves in this memorable story of a friendship that grew from a “sparkle in her eyes, as though we were friends who got a kick out of each other, even though we hadn't spoken yet.” (MF)

Louis Sachar offers a sequel of sorts to Holes, winner of the 1999 Newbery Award. Two years after his departure from Camp Green Lake Armpit is still digging holes—working for a landscape service. (Random House) He diligently tries to take Small Steps on the path to a different kind of life. Those steps include saving money, taking classes, and staying out of trouble. However, when his former camp mate X-Ray shows up with plans to make money quickly through a ticket scalping scheme, Armpit is drawn into his complicated venture. Readers will sense that something will go wrong with the venture, but it will be hard to predict how the fortunes of Armpit will intertwine with those of the popular but lonely young singing sensation whose concert generated such excitement and caused ticket prices to soar. Armpit's friendship with his young neighbor with cerebral palsy reveals his genuine concern for others and plays into situations that advance the quickly moving plot that will please middle graders. (KP)



Books reviewed in this issue

Rylant, Cynthia. Henry and Mudge and the Great Grandpas. Simon & Schuster, 2005. ISBN 0-689-81170-5. \$14.95

Van Leeuwen, Jean. Amanda Pig and the Really Hot Day. Illus. by Ann Schweninger. Dial, 2005. ISBN 0-803-72887-5. \$15.99

Bloom, Suzanne. A Splendid Friend, Indeed. Boyds Mills, 2005. ISBN 1-59078286-0. \$15.95

Silverman, Erica. Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa Harcourt, 2005. ISBN 0-15-202124-8. \$15

Silverman, Erica. Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa: Partners Harcourt, 2006. ISBN 0-15-202125-6. \$15

Samuels, Barbara. Happy Valentine's Day, Dolores. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006. ISBN 0-374-32844-7. \$16

Bateman, Teresa. Will You Be My Valenswine? Illus. by Kristina Stephenson. Albert Whitman, 2005. 0-807-59195-5. \$15.95

Hurwitz, Johanna. The Unsigned Valentine. HarperCollins, 2006. ISBN 0-06-056053-3 \$15.99

Cuyler, Margery. Groundhog Stays up Late. Illus. by Jean Cassels. Walker, 2005. ISBN 0-8027-8939-0. \$16.95

Jurmain, Suzanne, Tripp. George Did It. Illus. by Larry Day. Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0-525-47560-5. \$16.99

Harness, Cheryl. The Remarkable Benjamin Franklin. National Geographic, 2005. ISBN 0-7922-7882-8 \$17.95

Parks, Deborah. Nature's Machines. The Story of Biomechanist Mimi Koehl. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0-531-16780-1. \$31

Espeland, Pamela and Elizabeth Verdick. Loving to Learn. Free Spirit, 2005. ISBN 1-57542-183-6. \$9.95 (paperback)

Hawass, Zahi. Tutankhamun: The Mystery of the Boy King. National Geographic, 2005. ISBN 0-7922-8354-6. \$17.95.

Park, Linda Sue. Bee-bim Bop! Illus. by Ho Baek Lee. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0-618-26511-2. \$15.

Zronik, John. The Biography of Rice. Crabtree, 2006. ISBN 0-7787-2482-4. \$23.92

Eagen, Rachel. The Biography of Bananas. Crabtree, 2006. ISBN 0-7787-2483-2. \$23.92

Guibert, Françoise de. Sing, Nightingale, Sing! Illus. by Chiaki Miyamoto. Kane/Miller, 2006. ISBN 1-929123-98-0. \$13.95

Johnson, Lindan Lee. The Dream Jar. Illus. by Serena Curmi. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0-618-17698-5. \$16

Pulver, Robin. Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day. Illus. by Lynn Rowe Reed. Holiday House, 2006. ISBN 0-8234-1982-7. \$16.95

Kerr, M.E. Your Eyes in Stars. HarperCollins, 2006. ISBN 0-06-075682-9. \$15.99

Sachar, Louis. Small Steps. Random House, 2006. ISBN 0-385-73314-3. \$16.95

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MF—Marge Freking, Adjunct Instructor, Colleges of Arts and Humanities and Business

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

TS—Trisha Shaskan, English Department Teaching Assistant and Children's Book Author