

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's/YoungAdult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Although we expect creative approaches in fiction and picture books, sometimes it's easy to overlook how nonfiction books can engage readers while sharing information. Take math books, for example. The shelves of the CCYAB hold many new titles from 2003 that entice students to consider math as more than computation and lead to connections with other parts of the curriculum.

The team that brought us How Much is a Million? returns with Millions to Measure (HarperCollins). David Schwartz and Steven Kellogg collaborate to bring back Marvelosissimo the Mathematical Magician. After explaining the origin of measurements such as the foot and pound, Marvelosissimo soon confuses his audience with ounces, pints, teaspoons, inches, yards. Then he turns to the metric system, aided by an impressive center spread that opens out to four pages with an actual-size meter across the top. The rest of the book, including three pages of text following the illustrated pages, explains the metric system in more detail and encourages students to try it on a regular basis, especially because the United States is the only major country that still employs the inch-pound system.

Making that mental conversion will require looking at the world in new ways, which is what Greg Tang tries to accomplish in his unique approaches to math. Among his 2003 titles is Math Appeal (Scholastic). In these "mind-stretching math riddles," Tang poses problems that encourage readers to look for patterns in the illustrations to come up with the answers more quickly. For those who are stumped, a key at the end

provides an explanation of how to arrive at the answer.

Younger math students can begin to recognize patterns and shapes with the help of books in Sarah Schuette's Shapes series from Capstone. Each title includes a basic explanation of the geometric shape and then provides photographs of examples children are likely to encounter regularly. In Squares, for example, she features a checkerboard, a calendar, and a waffle. Circles includes a compact disc, a frisbee, and pancakes. Each book concludes with a suggested activity related to the shape. Features such as having the page numbers enclosed in the target shape of the book help reinforce learning.

The pizza on the cover of Schuette's Circles leads naturally to another math title, Pizza Counting by Christina Dobson (Charlesbridge). What kid doesn't love pizza? Who can resist adding a variety of toppings, particularly when they make intricate patterns such as the ones devised by illustrator Matthew Holmes? Starting with a few slices of olives, mushroom, tomatoes, and peppers to make a face, the book quickly progresses to complex creations with 100 pieces. Those who follow along can simply count or try some of the addition and multiplication options offered. More advanced skills are required when Dobson turns to fractions as pizzas are sliced. Along with math, Dobson serves up intriguing facts about pizza, and the mouth-watering photographs are likely to make lunch seem much too distant.

Beginning counters will feel more at home with some picture book titles,

including Cleo's Counting Book by Caroline Mockford (Barefoot). Cleo, a tangerine-colored cat with darker orange stripes, wanders through her neighborhood, counting all the way. Among the familiar objects for readers to count with her are birds, trees, and dogs. The simple illustrations include large numerals, and the items to be counted are easy to find. Although Cleo doesn't venture past 10, a height chart included with the book measures growing readers for many inches and centimeters.

Harriet Ziefert's counting story incorporates numbers to twelve. In A Dozen Ducklings Lost and Found (Houghton Mifflin) a mother duck takes her babies for a walk. Despite her careful counting, she loses some along the way. The problem? Some of them have fallen into the fencepost holes made by Farmer Donald. Once he rescues the ducklings, they complete their journey to the pond successfully. Donald Dreifuss' illustrations have an unfinished and muddled quality that doesn't serve the story well, but the ducklings can be found easily enough by young counters.

The ducklings created by Derek Anderson for Lauren Thompson's Little Quack (Simon & Schuster) exude personality and mark an impressive debut by this Minnesota illustrator. Mama duck encourages her five ducklings to leave the nest and start swimming. One after another, they enter the pond, until even Little Quack overcomes his fears and splashes in with the rest. A "quack-u-lator" along the bottom helps keep track of the number of ducklings in the pond. With a variety of colors and designs, Anderson endows each of the five with a distinguishing "hair-do," and their facial expressions reveal their emotions. These ducklings beg to be turned into stuffed animals so that counters could touch them as well as identify them on the pages.

Deborah Lee Rose's watery counting takes us far from a Minnesota pond in One Nighttime Sea: An Ocean Counting Rhyme (Scholastic). Veteran illustrator Steve Jenkins uses paper collage to stunning effect as he draws viewers into the world of reef lobsters, coral polyps, nudibranchs, and other marine animals. In case you've never heard of nudibranchs or other creatures mentioned, Rose offers paragraph-long explanations at the end of the book. However, the animals are easy enough to count without knowing anything else about them as readers explore the world under the sea.

Those who want to learn more about the world coral polyps inhabit can turn to Colorful Captivating Coral Reefs by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent (Walker). Patent specializes in providing clear introductions to scientific topics, and this book is no exception. She explains the structure of coral reefs, introduces a variety of animals found in the habitat, and outlines the threats to their existence. In short, this is a welcome resource for elementary students needing to write a report or simply learn more about a fascinating ecosystem.

Older readers may want to venture farther into the ocean with Sally Walker in her exploration of Fossil Fish Found Alive (Carolrhoda). Although Walker provides a great deal of information about coelacanths, her book is as much about the process of scientific discovery as the fish themselves. Until 1939, scientists assumed that coelacanths had been extinct for millions of years. That year, Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer of the East London Museum in South Africa recognized the unusual features of a fish in a catch she was examining for possible inclusion in the collection. She contacted an ichthyologist, who identified the creature and began a search to locate other examples of the unusual and ancient fish. Maps,

photographs, and drawings help bring the continuing study of the coelacanth to life.

A more familiar sea creature is the subject of Nicola Davies' Surprising Sharks (Candlewick). Davies incorporates a great deal of information about sharks large and small, revealing that most of them are not the terrifying threats portrayed in movies or sensational news stories. Diagrams identify the common characteristics of sharks of all shapes and sizes. She points out that 30 of the 500 different kinds of sharks have ever attacked humans, and about six people die in shark attacks each year. In contrast, people kill 100 million sharks annually. So who really scares what?

Among animals that scare some humans are spiders. Seymour Simon explores their world in Spiders from HarperCollins. Amazing close-up photographs draw us into the world of the spider. They help us appreciate how spiders live in a variety of habitats and use their silk in a number of ways, including the production of various kinds of webs. Simon explains how the activities of many of them actually benefit humans.

Deborah Kent introduces readers to animals that interact more directly with people in Animal Helpers for the Disabled (Franklin Watts). After discussing the history of guide dog programs, she talks about the training the animals undergo to learn how to help their owners. In addition to discussing the familiar "seeing eye" dogs, she provides information about animals that offer assistance to people who have hearing loss or need other kinds of help. Photographs show the animals at work in many situations. Among the helpers are "guide horses" which work in rural areas.

Gail Gibbons' picture book overview of Horses! (Holiday House) doesn't include guide horses but offers lots of basic information about the animals. She includes a history of horses, including their

domestication, and an overview of their characteristics. She explains how horseshoes are used, defines different gaits, and identifies a number of well-known purebred varieties. Young horse lovers will appreciate this clear introduction.

Life in the country involves more than animals. Lola M. Schaefer traces the path from flower to fruit in Pick, Pull, Snap! (Greenwillow). Each page that explains the structure of the flower and the development of seeds folds opens to reveal a picture of the ripe fruit. Additional information, including instructions for raising the half-dozen plants in the volume, is provided at the end. Even children who don't garden themselves can gain a new appreciation for the transformation that is part of the life of plants.

Pam Munoz Ryan focuses on one food crop in How Do You Raise a Raisin? (Charlesbridge). Using a question-and-answer format, she offers explanations about the best locations for growing grapes, methods for raising, harvesting and drying the crop, and uses for the finished product. She also supplies a bit of history and a couple recipes that require no baking. Craig Brown's whimsical illustrations add humorous touches to this overview of a familiar food.

Ruth Freeman Swain provides history of another tasty product in How Sweet It is (and Was): The History of Candy (Holiday House). Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans used honey to produce early candies, and the manufacture has evolved into a huge industry. A fascinating "candy time line" documents such milestones as the invention of candy corn and the first sales of Milky Way and Snickers. Swain explains some ingredients such as carrageenan and lecithin that are found in candy bars and provides recipes for fudge and taffy in case readers want to try candy making on their

own. Who knew that history could be so sweet?

An historic expedition currently receiving a great deal of attention is the journey Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began 100 years ago. Dorothy Hinshaw Patent merges history and science in Plants on the Trail with Lewis and Clark (Houghton Mifflin). During his travels Lewis collected seeds, roots, cuttings, and entire plants, and he made notes about plants encountered on the journey. He documented their uses for food and medicine. Yet, his contributions as a naturalist were ignored for more than 100 years. Patent's text and William Munoz's photographs help modern readers appreciate some of the plants that were identified on the original expedition.

The forests still provide plenty of opportunities for study and research, as Stephen Swinburne documents in The Woods Scientist (Houghton Mifflin). This volume, part of the "Scientists in the Field" series, explains the work of forester and ecologist Susan Morse. Her photographs of wildlife accompany the text and help underscore her message about the need for habitat preservation.

Celebration of nature is the unifying theme of Judith Nicholls' compilation of poems in The Sun in Me (Barefoot). She gathered poems from many time periods and cultures. Poets range from Sappho to John Updike, from Emily Dickinson to Rabindranath Tagore. Most poems are brief, and all of them exude the wonder of the earth and its creatures. Although she provides information about some of the poets in an introduction, a more complete identification, even brief paragraphs at the end, would have enriched the volume for teachers. However, listeners can appreciate the text and accompanying illustrations without that knowledge.

Among the animals mentioned in the poems are birds, a part of the natural world

most children encounter. Irene Kelly concentrates on one particular type in It's a Hummingbird's Life (Holiday House). Unusual typography swoops through the pages and creates a sense of motion that is an essential part of hummingbirds' existence. The book covers their life cycle, including their remarkable migration from the United States to Central or South America.

Marilyn Singer chooses another bird, the robin, as the subject of one of her poems in Fireflies at Midnight (Simon & Schuster). She looks at 14 different animals during the course of a summer's day, starting with the robin at one dawn and concluding with mole at the next. Ken Robbins' illustrations bring an intensity to the visual experience that causes viewers to consider even familiar animals in new ways.

Megan Montague Cash provides a more straightforward introduction to all the seasons in What Makes the Seasons? (Viking). This explanation for early learners uses rhyme plus bright illustrations to consider the characteristics of the four seasons and offers a simple introduction to the idea that the earth's movement around the sun causes the changes.

A more unusual look at the seasons combines math and poetry in Mathematicles! by Betsy Franco (Simon & Schuster). The word "equations" in the book follow a girl and her cat through the year. Although the graphs and computations employ concepts that are unusual in math books, the exercises may stimulate creative thinking for some math-related poems by students. For example, the winter section includes "1/2 of icicle = ice."

Which leads us to books that consider subjects all too familiar to Minnesotans during this season. In Names for Snow, Judi K. Beach begins with the idea that some cultures include many names for the white flakes and comes up with

alternatives of her own (Hyperion). An intrepid mouse family encounters snow as Lace, Magician, Tickle, and other manifestations. Their enjoyment of winter might encourage preschoolers to venture outdoors themselves.

On the other hand, staying outside in winter is far from the minds of the animals in Marjorie Dennis Murray's Don't Wake Up the Bear! (Cavendish). Bear has settled down in a cozy cave to hibernate during the long, cold season. He is joined by one animal after another as they search for a warm place to spend the days. Their plan works fine until mouse sneezes and wakes up the very hungry bruin!

Judy Cox's picture book centers on an animal that always wakes up, at least temporarily, on February 2. However, hibernation doesn't come easily for this groundhog, and the restless creature ventures out during autumn and winter holidays before he manages to settle down for a nap. Go To Sleep, Groundhog! (Holiday House) provides an enjoyable look at a holiday that is not explored too often in children's books.

Those interested in other winter celebrations will enjoy The Shortest Day by Wendy Pfeffer (Dutton). She explains the origin of a number of festivities occurring on or near December 21 and includes information about methods people used long ago to mark the passage of the year based on the sun's movements. She mentions Roman, Druid, and other celebrations and talks about current customs such as decorating with lights and exchanging gifts. A helpful diagram shows the relative locations of the sun and earth during the winter and summer solstices and the autumn and spring equinox. Suggestions for science experiments and winter solstice parties round out the volume.

We hope your celebration of all seasons includes enjoying new books for children and young adults. We invite you to stop by the CCYAB to look at new arrivals and to check our web page to find out about award winners, publishers, and other information that can help in your search for titles for your school, library, and personal collection.

Ordering information for books included in this issue

Beach, Judi K. Names for Snow. [Hyperion](#). ISBN 0-7868-1937-5. \$16.99.

Cash, Megan Montague. What Makes the Seasons? [Viking](#). ISBN 0-670-03598-X. \$15.99.

Cox, Judy. Go To Sleep, Groundhog! [Holiday House](#). ISBN 0-8234-1645-3. \$16.95.

Davies, Nicola. Surprising Sharks. [Candlewick](#). ISBN 0-7636-2185-4. \$15.99.

Dobson, Christina. Pizza Counting. [Charlesbridge](#). ISBN 0-88106-338-X. \$16.95.

Franco, Betsy. Mathematickles! [Simon & Schuster](#). ISBN 0-689-84357-7. \$17.95.

Gibbons, Gail. Horses! [Holiday House](#). ISBN 0-8234-1703-4. \$16.95.

Kelly, Irene. It's a Hummingbird's Life. [Holiday House](#). ISBN 0-8234-1658-5. \$16.95.

Kent, Deborah. Animal Helpers for the Disabled. [Watts](#). ISBN 0-531-12017-1. \$24.

Mockford, Caroline. Cleo's Counting Book. [Barefoot](#). ISBN 1-84148-207-2. \$14.99.

Murray, Marjorie Dennis. Don't Wake Up the Bear! [Cavendish](#). ISBN 0-7614-5107-2. \$14.95.

Nicholls, Judith, comp. The Sun in Me. [Barefoot](#). ISBN 1-84148-05804. \$16.99.

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw. Colorful Captivating Coral Reefs. [Walker](#). ISBN 0-8027-8862-9. \$17.95.

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw. Plants on the Trail with Lewis and Clark. [Houghton Mifflin](#). ISBN 0-618-06776-0. \$18.

Pfeffer, Wendy. The Shortest Day. [Dutton](#). ISBN 0-525-46968-0. \$16.99.

Rose, Deborah Lee. One Nighttime Sea. [Scholastic](#). ISBN 0-439-33906-5. \$16.95

Ryan, Pam Munoz. How Do You Raise a Raisin? [Charlesbridge](#). ISBN 1-57091-397-8. \$16.95.

Schaefer, Lola M. Pick, Pull, Snap! [Greenwillow](#). ISBN 0-688-17834-0. \$15.99.

Schuette, Sarah. Circles. [Capstone](#). ISBN 0-7368-1460-4.
Squares. ISBN 0-7368-1463-9. \$21.26 each.

Schwartz, David M. Millions to Measure. [HarperCollins](#). ISBN 0-06-623784-X. \$17.89.

Simon, Seymour. Spiders. [HarperCollins](#). ISBN 0-06-028392-0. \$16.89.

Singer, Marilyn. Fireflies at Midnight. [Simon & Schuster](#). ISBN 0-689-82492-0. \$16.95.

Swain, Ruth Freeman. How Sweet It is (and Was) [Holiday House](#). ISBN 0-8234-1712-3. \$16.95.

Swinburne, Stephen R. The Woods Scientist. [Houghton Mifflin](#). ISBN 0-618-04602-X. \$16.

Tang, Greg. Math Appeal. [Scholastic](#). ISBN 0-439-21046-1. \$16.95.

Thompson, Lauren. Little Quack. [Simon & Schuster](#). ISBN 0-689-84723-8. \$14.95.

Walker, Sally M. Fossil Fish Found Alive. [Carolrhoda](#). ISBN 1-57505-536-8. \$17.95.

Ziefert, Harriet. A Dozen Ducklings Lost and Found. [Houghton Mifflin](#). ISBN 0-618-14175-8. \$15.

Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

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