

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

January 2006

The Center for Children's and Young Adult Books (CCYAB) and Book Notes would not exist without the energy and dedication of its first director, Dr. Doris Pagel. She died January 17, at the age of 77. The Minnesota community of librarians, teachers, parents, and all who love children's books has lost an advocate and friend. For many years, Doris taught in the Library Media Education Department here at Minnesota State Mankato. When the Minnesota Department of Education decided that they could no longer maintain their examination collection in St. Paul, Doris and other members of the LME Department drafted a proposal to have the books transferred to Mankato.

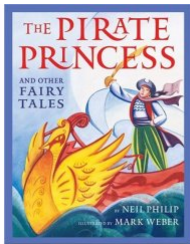
The collection arrived in 1983. With Doris as Director, the CCYAB was established in a classroom space adjacent to the LME offices. Among her projects to publicize the collection was the creation of Book Notes, to alert readers to some of the new arrivals in the collection. Even after her retirement, she continued to write reviews of books by Minnesota authors for many years. The fact that this issue contains some reviews of books by Minnesota authors and illustrators would certainly please her.

Her desire to engage children in reading led to her work in establishing the Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, a program in which students who read a number of books from a list of nominees can vote for their top choice. The award is presented on April 25, the birthday of Lovelace, whose Betsy-Tacy books are set in Mankato. For many years, the selection of nominees took place in Mankato, at sessions chaired by Doris and by Mary Ann VandeVusse, children's services librarian at the Minnesota Valley Regional Library. Eventually, the reading program evolved into the Minnesota Youth Reading Awards with two different overlapping lists of nominated books for different grade levels. [<http://www.isd77.k12.mn.us/lovelace/myra.htm>]

After she retired, Doris was able to realize one of her longstanding ambitions: to create a directory of Minnesota authors and illustrators of children's books. She published two editions of Authors and Illustrators as Program Resources: Minnesota Creators of Juvenile Books, which formed the basis of the online directory now maintained by Metronet.

[\[http://www.metronet.lib.mn.us/present/index.cfm\]](http://www.metronet.lib.mn.us/present/index.cfm) Those of us who were lucky enough to know Doris will never forget her enthusiasm, her curiosity, her energy, her strong opinions, and her delight in books and reading. She would certainly enjoy reading many of the books reviewed in this issue.

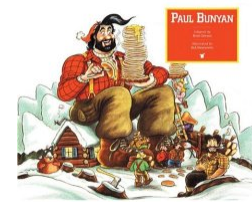
Rabbi Nahman Ben Simha of Bratslav (1172-1810) is remembered as an important religious teacher and storyteller whose fairy tales were composed at the same time that the Grimms started collecting folk tales. In his later years, Rabbi Nahman used fairy tales as his principal tool in religious teaching. In the book, The Pirate Princess and Other Fairy Tales



(Scholastic), storyteller Neil Philip retells some of Nahman’s stories while illustrator, Mark Weber, brings them to life with his abstract vivid illustrations that are reminiscent of Chagall. In the story, “The Pirate Princess,” two kings arrange for their son and daughter to marry. While the children do fall in love as planned, they also lose each other on an island.

This intricately woven tale follows the Princess’s journey in which she steals a ship and becomes a pirate to avoid marrying two unfit suitors before she eventually ends up with her true love. The story, like the rest of the fairy tales, parables, and folktales in the book, has universal appeal. This book is a gift for both the young and old, as are all timeless tales. –TS

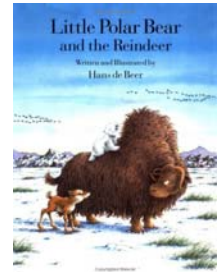
Kids will love the picture book Paul Bunyan (ABDO/Rabbit Ears) adapted by Brian Gleeson and illustrated by Rick Meyerowitz simply because it’s fun. Brian Gleeson’s colorful descriptions are perfectly complemented by Rick Meyerowitz’s humorous illustrations.



Paul Bunyan is the “biggest, bestest, toughest, strongest, ding dandiest logger there ever was.” Gleeson retells how Paul met his ox, Babe, who became so large that the distance between the tips of his horns “measured one-hundred-forty-two ax handles, four bottles of sassafrass soda, a plug of chewin’ tobacco, and a hard-boiled egg.” Paul Bunyan isn’t the only interesting member of the logging camp featured in his tales. They include characters such as Johnny Inkslinger, the accountant, and Hot Biscuit Sally, the cook! Whether one is reading about the time that Paul is ordered to clear-cut the Dakotas or learning how Babe created

Minnesota’s ten thousand lakes, this book is sure to entertain even the reluctantest, rowdiest, or even run-of-the-mill, customer. –TS

Although Paul Bunyan traveled widely, he never made it as far as the North Pole, the setting for Hans de Beer’s popular series of picture books (North-South). In Little Polar Bear and the Reindeer, little polar bear and some musk oxen help a little reindeer who got separated from the herd during a snow storm. Going by instinct, little polar bear leads the reindeer south toward the reindeer herd. However, when they encounter a chain-link fence, some musk oxen, working together, manage to knock down the fence so the two little friends can complete their journey. The illustrations, drawn in a cute but realistic manner, show young readers the landscapes of the North Pole as well as some of the animals that live in that region. –MF

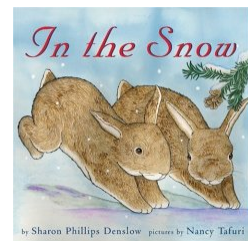


Preschoolers explore the outdoors in much more familiar territory in Winter Friends (Random House). After a storm, a little girl looks down at the snowy urban landscape and happily heads outside to play. She and her mother solve the “mystery” of a single blue mitten by tracking down the little boy who had left it in a drift. Mary Quattlebaum’s series of vignettes



about the snowy day are expressed in brief poems. Among those that are particularly effective is “Icicle Piano,” in which the falling shards make sounds as they fall on objects below and the slanted lines of “Sledding” that capture the swift trip down a favorite hill. Hiroe Nakata’s illustrations of rosy-cheeked children capture the energy and enthusiasm of young children on a magical day of frosty fun. –KP

Children aren’t the only ones who spend time outdoors in winter. In the Snow by Sharon Phillips Denslow (HarperCollins) tells the story of birds and animals that discover millet, thistle, and corn in the snow. How did it get there? Chickadees, sparrows, crows, and cardinals find the food welcome, as do squirrels, bunnies, field mice, and possum. Nancy Tafuri’s illustrations show impressive detail of the wildlife that search for food in the winter and might encourage picture book listeners to look for birds and animals in their own neighborhoods. –MF

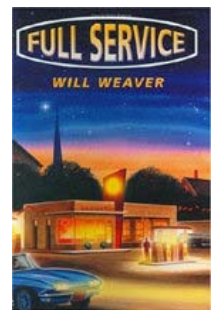


Winter forms the backdrop of one of many new young adult novels written by Minnesota authors. Marsha Qualey's Just Like That begins on a frigid night in Minneapolis (Penguin). After breaking up with her boyfriend, eighteen-year-old Hanna Martin takes a midnight walk near Lake Calhoun. Absorbed in analyzing her own emotions, she fails to warn a young couple about the thin ice on the lake. When she learns the next day that their Jeep had gone through the



ice and both had drowned, she realizes she was probably the last person to see them alive. The terrible secret undermines her close relationships with her mother and best friends. Her involvement with a young man who had found the girl's frozen body leads to a sexual relationship before she realizes he is only 14. Her connections with his famous family are more long-lasting, especially because his sister is also coping with guilt over an accident in which several friends had died. The complex plot uncovers several long-buried family secrets. Although the final chapter compresses a number of years to supply some answers to "what happened next," Qualey resists the temptation to provide pat solutions to complex human relationships.—KP

Will Weaver sets Full Service in the Minnesota countryside during the summer of 1965 (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Sixteen-year old Paul Sutton and his family belong to a nondenominational fundamentalist religious group whose members live on farms and share labor for efforts such as harvesting crops. When his mother insists that he get a job in town to "meet the public," he ends up working at a gas station. His observations of the lives and loves of various townspeople and his own introduction to alcohol and romance expand his understanding of human nature in unexpected ways. In the background is the pulse of the even wider world as the Vietnam War and antiwar protestors reach into middle America. What remains unexplained is the relationship of his parents. His father remains firmly committed to his religious involvement while his mother pushes Paul into the wider world. At the end, she admits that she hadn't thought he would go quite so far when she sent him "out there." —KP

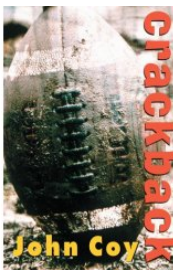


The narrator of Pete Hautman's Invisible has slipped over the bounds of sanity into obsession (Simon & Schuster). As Doug Hanson tells us about his relationship with his best friend, Andy

Hoffman, we grow increasingly suspicious about his view of reality. After all, Andy is a popular, gifted athlete while Doug is an outcast in his high school. He spends hours building a suspension bridge for his model railroad. The eleven-foot structure is made of over 20,000 matches, all with their phosphorus tips removed. As Doug explains, “Andy and I had some bad luck with fires when we were kids.” Slowly, the reader comes to realize exactly what that “bad luck” meant for Andy and how Doug’s parents and psychiatrist seem increasingly unable to help him cope with the past or cling to reality. The chilling ending is somewhat ambiguous but far from happy in any possible interpretation. –KP



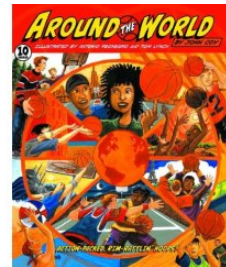
Young male protagonists feature prominently in many of the stories in the anthology Guys Read, edited by Jon Scieszka (Penguin). Among the 19 authors who contributed short stories are Chris Crutcher, Terry Davis, and Stephen King. Scieszka describes the book as, “A bunch of pieces by a bunch of guys . . . all about being a guy.” Anthony Horowitz writes in “My French Teacher Tried to Kill Me” about daydreams a twelve-year-old-boy enjoys during French lessons when he amuses himself with retaliatory tactics he’d like to use on his teacher. Young boys will relate well to such musings. In “Learning How to Be a Boy,” James Howe describes stereotypical behaviors of boys and girls and learns, “I am a boy—even if I don’t spit and fart and act tough.” Howe stresses in a humorous way that being natural—being yourself—is the most important part of being a boy . . . or of being anybody. From fantasy to fiction, sci-fi to sports, comics to nostalgia, and sports to girls, Guys Read is filled with well-written, insightful stories that should please any young man’s taste in reading. –MF



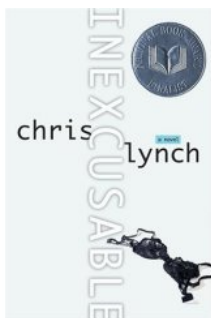
John Coy bases his first novel for young adults on a sports theme in Crackback (Scholastic). Miles Manning looks forward to his junior year in high school for a chance to be a starter on the football team. But clashes with a new coach and his father’s unremitting criticism soon wear him down. When he resists the pressure of his best friend and teammate to join him in taking steroids to enhance his athletic performance, Miles feels even more alienated. However, he discovers that there is life off the football field with people who

aren't the most celebrated athletes. Revelations about his parents' past provide some insights into his father's alienation from his in-law and his reluctance to show affection to his children. Although football figures prominently in the novel, the book is about much more than the outcome of a game or a season. –KP

Coy also has an illustrated sports-related book for elementary school readers. The comic book format takes us Around the World in a nonstop basketball competition across continents (Lee & Low). The game begins in New York, where Jamal and his sister Tanika join a pickup game at a local court. The action shifts to Australia, China, Turkey, Nigeria, Brazil, and other locales, where impromptu games are played on various courts indoors and out. The play concludes in New York, where Tanika suggests a new game of "Around the World." Coy includes directions for how to play that game plus a diagram so that young hoopsters can engage in some basketball competitions of their own. The format works well with the fast-paced interaction of characters. –KP



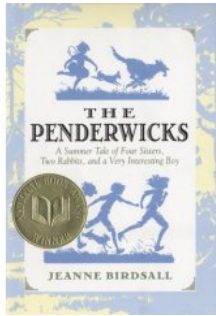
A darker view of athletics is offered by Christ Lynch in Inexcusable, a National Book Award finalist (Simon & Schuster). The narrator, Keir Sarafian, a self-proclaimed "good guy," tries to explain to us why he couldn't possibly have raped Gigi Boudakian the night after the prom. In a series of flashbacks to events of his senior year, Keir relates how his popularity increased after



he seriously injured a member of the opposing football team in a move that earned him the "affectionate" nickname of Killer. The widespread use of alcohol and drugs by team members and their harmless hijinks, such as vandalism and bullying, are all simplified and dismissed as harmless by Keir's endless capacity for self-delusion. Even when he sees a video of himself and the team members, he can't admit what he has

done. The fact that no adult calls him to account makes him seem invincible. After all, his college scholarship offers materialized after he had crippled the opponent. His father, a "good guy" himself, joins Keir in a drink... or two... or more. Although he can't apply it to his own actions, he summarizes the story in the first pages: "The way it looks is *not* the way it is." –KP

The winner of the National Book Award has a far different tone than that of Lynch's book. The Penderwicks by Jeanne Birdsall recounts the adventures of a family of four sisters who spend part of the summer at a cottage on an estate in the Berkshires (Random House). Rosalind (12), Skye (11), Jane (10), and Batty (4) are often left to their own devices by their father, a

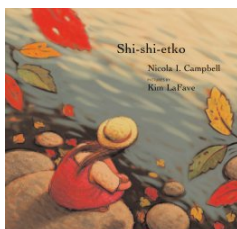


widower and absent-minded botany professor. Accompanied by their dog, Hound, they quickly run into problems with Mrs. Tifton, the “very proper” lady who lives in the manor house and doesn't want her son Jeffrey, associating with the girls. Of course, he does anyway, and the sisters manage to help him foil his mother's plans to send him to a military academy. Rosalind develops a crush on the 18-year-old guy who tends Mrs. Tifton's vast gardens. Batty has a close encounter with a bull. These and similar emotional and physical upheavals keep the plot moving and will engage middle-grade students, especially girls. –KP

Another novel for that age group is The Game of Silence by Minnesota author Louise Erdrich (HarperCollins). This sequel to The Birchbark House once again follows Omakayas and her family through a year. However, the tone this time is darker. In 1850, the Ojibwe who live on an island in Lake Superior can no longer ignore the encroaching presence of white people. Omakayas' dreams and visions lead her to the inescapable conclusion that she and her family will have to travel farther west. Yet, amid the uncertainty, there are events and rituals of daily life described in loving detail. As the family sets off in a canoe at the book's end, Omakayas senses the hostility of “enemies who resented the Ojibwe entering their territory” but also that there “was not only danger but possibility.” One hopes Erdrich will continue the saga. –KP



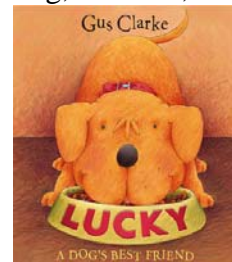
Native peoples in Canada also faced displacement and upheaval. The picture book, Shi-shi-etko, (Groundwood) by Nicola I. Campbell and illustrated by Kim LaFave, is



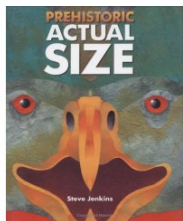
the story of a little native girl who has to leave her home to go to Indian Residential School. For many years, it was common practice in Canada and other countries to force native children to leave their homes to attend boarding schools where they would learn about European culture and religion, and be

forced to speak English. In her book, Campbell captures the daily natural rituals of Shi-shi-etko's life at the reservation before leaving for boarding school with poetic prose. When describing the family home, Campbell writes, "Sunlight, wood smoke/and scents of barbecued/sockeye salmon/filled the air." LaFave's illustrations are dreamy and subdued. Lafave illuminates the landscapes in the story with red, orange, and brown hues that make it look like the sun is setting and rising, just as Shi-shi-etko will leave for boarding school and return to her natural home. –TS

Gus Clarke's picture book, Lucky, has a happier ending (Kane/Miller). One day, Lucky finds himself in a dog shelter where the people are nice and all the dogs are friendly. While the dogs wait for new families to take them home, they enjoy their new friends and the people who take care of them. This heartwarming book shows the dog's view of life inside the shelter and observations of the people who visit to find just the right pets. One big, brown dog, Bernard, wants a new home very badly, but nobody chooses him. Lucky has an idea to help him and convinces the other dogs to misbehave next time visitors come. By working together, the dogs realize their plan to get Bernard adopted. The illustrations are charming, colorful, and detailed, and provide insight on the value of shelters for animals. –MF



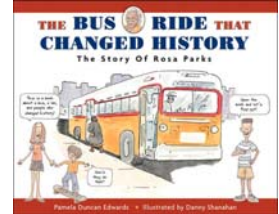
Children who are interested in animals much more wild than the average pet will relish Steve Jenkins' Prehistoric Actual Size (Houghton Mifflin). As in his award-winning Actual Size,



Jenkins uses his torn-paper collages to create images that are the exact size of the animal (or part of the animal) depicted. This time all his choices are from creatures that lived millions of years ago. The double-page spread of some teeth of the Giganotosaurus will give anyone pause while the six-inch long

Protoceratops emerging from its shell looks almost cute. The brief paragraphs with each illustration offer basic information about the animal, including its size and when it lived. Not all of the animals are dinosaurs. A 4-inch flying cockroach and an 8-foot high terror bird are among the creatures Jenkins introduces. Additional information, including how scientists decide what these ancient animals looked like, rounds out the intriguing volume. –KP

A final nonfiction title in this issue could be useful in connection with celebrations of Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month. The Bus Ride That Changed History by Pamela Duncan Edwards (Houghton Mifflin) shows what one woman can accomplish by just saying, “No!” When Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on a bus to a white man, she was arrested. An Alabama judge found her guilty of breaking segregation laws. The same day she received her verdict, the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott began, led by Martin Luther King. Eleven months later, the Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was illegal, and history changed because of one woman who said, “No!” Shanahan’s illustrations show snapshot moments of the bus boycott and other inequalities that brought about the birth of the Civil Rights Movement a year earlier (1954). Comments from tiny people at the bottom of each illustration define the meanings of events and tell young readers, “Dr. King and other leaders are calling for an end to all types of racial segregation.” In response, another tiny person says, “Now that the movement has started, nothing can stop it!” The book includes a time line from Park’s birth in 1913 to 1999, when she received the “Congressional Medal of Freedom, the highest honor Congress can give.” Fifth graders who study history will enjoy the clear, concise presentation as well as the explanations from the tiny commentators at the bottom of each page. –MF



Books reviewed in this issue

Philip, Neil. The Pirate Princess and Other Fairy Tales. Illus. by Mark Weber. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0590108557. \$19.99

Gleeson, Brian. Paul Bunyan. Illus. by Rick Meyerowitz. ABDO, 2005. ISBN 159197767. \$17.95

De Beer, Hans. Little Polar Bear and the Reindeer. North-South, 2005. ISBN 0735820295. \$15.95

Quattlebaum, Mary. Winter Friends. Illus. by Hiroe Nakata. Random House, 2005. ISBN 0-385-75626-1. \$15.95

Denslow, Sharon, Phillips. In the Snow. Illus. by Nancy Tafuri. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 006059683x. \$15.99

Qualey, Marsha. Just Like That. Penguin, 2005. ISBN 0-8037-2840-9. \$16.99

Weaver, Will. Full Service. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. ISBN 0-374-32485-9. \$17

Hautman, Pete. Invisible. Simon & Schuster, 2005. ISBN 0-689-86800-6. \$15.95

Guys Read, edited by Jon Scieszka. Penguin, 2005. ISBN 0-670060070. \$16.99

Coy, John. Crackback. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0-439-69733-6. \$16.99

Coy, John. Around the World. Illus. by Antonio Reonegro and Tom Lynch. Lee & Low, 2005. ISBN 1-58430-244-5. \$17.95

Lynch, Chris. Inexcusable. Simon & Schuster, 2005. ISBN 0-689-84789-0. \$16.95

Birdsall, Jeanne. The Penderwicks. Random House, 2005. ISBN 0-375-83143-6. \$15.95

Erdrich, Louise. The Game of Silence. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0-06-029790-5. \$16.89

Campbell, Nicola. Shi-shi-etko. Illus. by Kim LaFave. Greenwood, 2005. ISBN 0888996594
\$16.95

Clarke, Gus. Lucky. Kane/Miller, 2005. ISBN 1929132840. \$7.95 (paperback)

Jenkins, Steve. Prehistoric Actual Size. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0-618-53578-0. \$16

Edwards, Pamela. The Bus Ride That Changed History: The Story of Rosa Parks Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0618449116. \$16

Reviewers:

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TS—Trisha Shaskan