

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

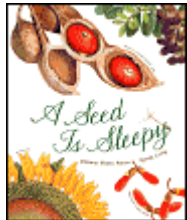
Minnesota State University, Mankato

June 2007

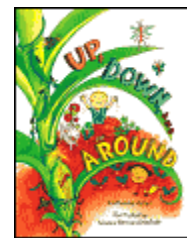
This issue of book notes marks the end of the school year, but the beginning of summer reading time! The weeks between the last day of classes and the start of teacher workshops offer a wonderful opportunity to investigate books in the CCYAB. Parking is easier. The schedule is more relaxed. Why not take the time to make a visit to the CCYAB to see the books reviewed below and the hundreds of other titles that have arrived in the past few months?

Books for Preschool and Primary Grades

Dianna Hutts Aston and Sylvia Long, who produced the outstanding *An Egg Is Quiet*, return with an equally impressive work, *A Seed Is Sleepy* (Chronicle). Aston's text reveals the secret life of seeds, including the fact that some can lie dormant for years before they sprout. She identifies ways in which seeds travel to other locations, through means such as wind, water, or animals. A series of comparative diagrams demonstrates the timetables for five different plants. Long's incredible illustrations reveal the beauty and variety of the seeds themselves and the plants, flowers, and fruits that are part of the cycles of growth. From the infinitesimal seeds in an orchid pod to the 60-pound seed of the coco de mer palm Aston and Long stretch readers' imagination and fuel their curiosity about the plant life that surrounds them. Even preschoolers will enjoy the pictures, but the book's value as a nonfiction resource extends into the elementary grades, and the sheer beauty of the illustrations will attract even older readers.—KP



Who knew that working in a garden could be such fun? Katherine Ayres follows two children *Up, Down, and Around* a patch that grows giant vegetables (Candlewick). From the time they plant and water seeds until they feast on a vegetable-filled lunch, they watch the plants grow and produce bumper crops of potatoes, peppers, corn, tomatoes, beets, broccoli, and more. Nadine Bernard Westcott supplies the high-energy illustrations. She fills each page with lots of action from insects, birds, and pets, as well as the two children. Yet, she manages to provide readers who might never garden themselves a visual introduction to how the vegetables they see in grocery stores and at produce stands grow above or under ground.—KP



At the start of Robert O. Bruel's story, *Bob and Otto* look quite a bit alike (Roaring Brook).



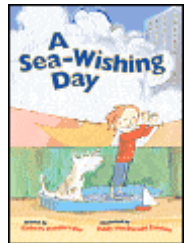
Both small creatures dig in the ground, munch leaves, and play in the grass. The only difference is that Bob is gold, with blue stripes, and Otto is pink. However, their ways diverge when Bob decides he must climb a tree to explore while Otto wants to dig deeper into the cool, damp ground. While Otto digs elaborate tunnels, Bob eats and eats until he spins a cocoon. Of course, when Bob wakes up from his long sleep, he looks nothing like his former self. Flying down to the base of the tree, he finds Otto, who envies Bob's wings and regrets that he didn't climb the tree to get a pair for himself. However, Bob points out that Otto's underground work loosened the

soil and made it possible for the tree to produce the leaves Bob needed to munch. Nick Bruel, who illustrated the story, found and adapted the manuscript after his father's death. He endows the two tiny friends with personality. Although it is unlikely that an earthworm and caterpillar would ever communicate in the "real world," the whimsical story provides readers with much to ponder about the value of friendship.—KP

In *Alligator Mike* a young boy named Mike accidentally finds 330 alligators living under the sewers of New York City (NorthSouth). With the help of Balbo and "four more odd characters...[who] looked like they were made of random leftover things," Mike helps the alligators find their way back to Florida, their original home. Jürg Federspiel's story would be best for three to six year olds, and while the premise of the story might sound scary for the young audience, the conversational dialogue and empowerment of Mike make it appropriate. "Why don't [the alligators] go back to Florida?" Mike asked. "They would if they could, but they can't," replies Balbo, showing the easy discourse between Mike and a strange creature he just met. Petra Rappo's illustrations also portray the sewers as a not unfriendly place. Although the background colors are dark, they are contrasted with the bright colors of Balbo, his friends, and the alligators, who are either green (new arrivals to the sewer) or white (long time residents). The illustrations also emphasize geometry. Balbo is a series of circles while the city, above ground, is a series of squares and rectangles.—NS



The picture book, *A Sea-Wishing Day* written by Robert Heidbreder and illustrated by Kady MacDonald Denton (Kids Can Press), begins when a boy states "I wished so hard/To sail the sea/That the sea/Sailed right to me!" Denton's use of watercolors creates a surreal landscape



where the yellowed grass and blue fence in the boy's backyard look like the sand and water he dreams of, and a kid's pool looks like the hull of a ship. As the poem continues, the backyard transforms until the fence is left behind, and a large ship comes "billowing by." The boy and his dog, Skipper, sail off and skim "the deep blue/From east to west." They pass a "rogue wave" whose face grimaces, become pirates, and have an adventure where they ride on a porpoise and pass a "foul-smelling beast." All the while, Denton's illustrations add texture to the

story: mermaids swim by, the boy and Skipper play with monkeys on an island, a parrot follows them, and Skipper wears a pearl necklace found in a treasure chest. The story ends when the boy and Skipper land ashore. "The sea was gone. There was only the pool/That sat on our lawn." This is a lovely illustration of the possibilities of the imagination "And wishing a ship/On a sea-wishing day." —TS

Behind the Museum Door is a collection of museum-themed poems meant to "celebrate the wonders of museums" as the subtitle suggests (Abrams). Editor Lee Bennett Hopkins has selected poems for five to seven year olds from multiple authors who have written about exhibits which could be found in museums. Some examples are "Mummy" by Myra Cohn Livingston, "To the Skeleton of a Dinosaur in the Museum" by Lilian Moore, and "Wheels" by Jane Yolen. The style of each poem is different, ranging from free verse to poems with rhyme schemes; yet they interact well with each other because the order is like traveling through a museum. Illustrator Stacey Dressen-McQueen writes in an introductory note that she was most inspired by "remembering the thrill of a school field trip." Her acrylic, oil pastel, and colored pencil drawings capture the sense of grandeur and antiquity of museum exhibits because of dark colors and visual texture. In most of the illustrations, children are also pictured looking at exhibits of



the subjects of the poems. The children are a diverse group, yet all united by their joy of the exhibits.—NS

Two recent picture books feature young girls who are intrigued by the saris worn by their mothers and grandmothers. In *Mama's Saris* by Pooja Makhijani, the narrator helps her mother select a sari to wear for a special occasion then begs to choose one to wear herself (Little,



Brown). After all, it is her seventh birthday they are celebrating! Most days Mama wears slacks and sweaters, but the saris add significance to an event. Finally, Mama gives in to her daughter's pleas and dresses her in a gold and blue sari. An author's note explains how Makhijani was fascinated by her mother's saris as she grew up and provides information about different styles of the garments. She also provides a glossary of the Hindi words that appear in the book. Elena Gomez's illustrations incorporate the colors and patterns of the saris, although in one instance text and fabric don't correspond accurately. The little girl appears much older than seven, which might puzzle attentive readers because of references to her age at several points in the story. However, the book provides insights into cultural traditions. —KP

Like the narrator in Makhijani's book, the little girl who tells the story in *My Dadima Wears a Sari* wants to wear one just like her grandmother (Peachtree). Although Rupa and her mother wear clothing such as dresses, skirts, slacks, blouses, and sweaters, Dadima always wears her sari. She explains some of its many uses such as serving as an umbrella when it starts to sprinkle or as a pouch to collect shells on a visit to the beach. Dadima lets Rupa and her younger sister explore her collection of saris, pointing out several that she wore on special occasions before she wraps them in smaller versions as a special treat. The author, Kashmiri Sheth, grew up wearing saris in India and emigrated to the United States as a teenager. The book includes a series of photographs in which one of her daughters demonstrates how to wrap a sari. Yoshiko Jaeggi's watercolors effectively incorporate the patterns of the sari cloth as backgrounds for the pictures of Rupa, Dadima, and their family's activities.—KP



Cat lovers will appreciate the exploration of the busy world of *Kittens! Kittens! Kittens!* by Susan Meyers (Abrams). David Walker provides the illustrations for this companion volume to the team's acclaimed *Puppies! Puppies! Puppies!* Kittens of varying patterns and colors fill the busy pages as they stalk a wind-up mouse, chase balls of yarn, and tentatively approach a container of kitty litter. Sometimes their actions are more destructive than cute, such as "climbing curtains, shredding chairs." However, as the pages progress, the felines get bells on their collars to warn birds and learn to use a scratching post instead of a chair. Eventually they grow "into cats, Strong and nimble acrobats. Chasing mice and rats away, Taking catnaps through the day." As these snippets demonstrate, Meyers' bouncy and energetic verse makes a wonderful read-aloud selection. Walker's paintings of the lovable, independent kittens might make even an inveterate dog-lover appreciate the tiny felines—at least as long as there is one more page to turn.—KP



Dedicated to "children everywhere sitting in cardboard boxes," *Not a Box*, written and illustrated by Antoinette Portis, fosters the imagination (HarperCollins). The picture book itself is a box. The cover has the texture of cardboard with a simple line drawing of a bunny next to a rectangle. It is "11.5 oz.," and the back has arrows on both sides of the text "THIS SIDE UP." Portis begins the clever narrative with the question: "Why are you sitting in a box?" The bunny is standing on top the rectangle. In the next spread, the box is transformed with a



volcano drawn over it in red, and the text reads, “It’s not a box.” As the book progresses, the box turns into a burning building, a race-car, and the basket in a hot air balloon while the narrator asks what it is. In the end, the simple answer comes: “It’s my Not-a-Box.” The simplicity of the idea and line drawings coupled with Portis’ vivid imagination make for a perfect children’s book. It would make a great addition to a preschool or elementary school classroom. —TS

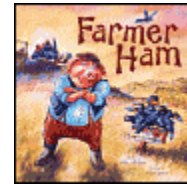
As the title *Smelly Bill* suggests (NorthSouth), Bill, the dog, has “a bleak / And really quite unpleasant reek.” When his family leaves for the day, Bill is put in the care of Great Aunt



Bleach, who loves to clean. She decides to bathe Bill since he is the dirtiest part of the house. Bill, though, does not want a bath and does his best to evade Great Aunt Bleach. Author and illustrator Daniel Postgate tells Bill’s story in a series of rhymes and near rhymes. “Across the yard he had to race / To find the perfect hiding place. / He dug down deep, down deep within / A very smelly compost bin,” writes Postgate about Bill’s escape from his bath. The rhymes move the

narrative forward and would engage a three to six year old’s ear. The illustrations emphasize movement, particularly in the chase scenes between Bill and Great Aunt Bleach. Outlines of characters and objects are rarely perfectly straight. The bright, contrasting colors also parallel the movement. Great Aunt Bleach’s outfit, for example, includes a yellow and orange dotted shirt, red and blue plaid skirt, a bright green apron, and red and yellow polka-dotted bloomers.—NS

Farmer Ham owns a cornfield which is overrun with crows (NorthSouth). “Silly old Farmer Ham!” the crows tease him, especially when he goes fishing in the pond and retrieves some unusual objects: a boot, a hat, a scarf, a jacket, and a pair of trousers. But the crows no longer think Farmer Ham is amusing when a new visitor comes to the cornfield. Alec Sillifant’s text shows the obvious conflict between a farmer and crows but also the more subtle conflict of who is smarter. The crows are witty, making jokes about what Farmer Ham pulls from the lake. “He could always eat the ‘sole,’” one crow says when the boot is revealed.



“He’s as mad as a hatter!” one crow says about the hat. Some of the language in the text requires an understanding of British-English, for example “sniggered” and “tatty,” but context and illustrations provide clues to their meanings. Mike Spoor’s illustrations highlight how much the crows enjoy teasing Farmer Ham. Rarely do the crows have the same expressions and body language. Instead, each seems to have a distinct personality. The illustrations also reveal how much Farmer Ham secretly enjoys tricking the crows, as evidenced by his constant smile. This book would be most enjoyable for three to six year olds.—NS

Books for Elementary and Middle School Readers

Ian Beck adds a new twist to fairy tales in *The Secret History of Tom Trueheart* (HarperCollins). Tom has six brothers named Jack who go on quests in the Land of Stories to



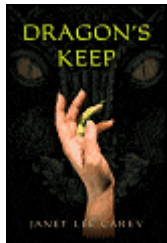
complete the tales that story devisers at the Story Bureau start. When Brother Ormestone, a story deviser, gets jealous that the brothers get all the credit for ending his stories, he decides to eliminate the brothers once and for all. One by one, Tom’s brothers receive their assignments and set off on their quests. When they don’t return, the Master of the Story Bureau sends a quest to Tom on his twelfth birthday. He is to find and rescue his older brothers. Tom, who has never felt brave, needs courage to find his brothers. A wood sprite disguised as a talking crow accompanies him. The crow must do whatever is necessary to help Tom, but he cannot change his form. Tom enters the stories of Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and the Frog Prince. He spends a night in the Gingerbread House

left over from Hansel and Gretel. However, Brother Ormestone has entered the stories ahead of Tom and has drugged all the brothers, carried them off, and locked them in the giant's dungeon atop the beanstalk. Tom must outwit the giant and Brother Ormestone. Reading the fairy tales from the perspective of having the heroes enter the stories at their beginnings to complete the adventures was a delightful diversion. Young readers will enjoy reading the familiar tales from this new perspective.—MF

Frank Cottrell Boyce's *Framed* reveals the same complex plotting and dry humor as his Carnegie Medal winning *Millions* (HarperCollins). *Framed* follows the life and times of the Hughes family and the small town of Manod, UK in which they live. The fictitious town is based on a historical town where London's artwork was taken during the Nazi invasion. There is no mention of Nazis in *Framed*, but London's most famous paintings are being stored in Manod's quarry. While the story focuses on Dylan, his sisters Marie and Minnie, and his baby brother Max, it ultimately is a story about a town pulling together and realizing that it has something special to offer. In addition to priceless artworks appearing in Manod, other strange occurrences include a mysterious theft of a vehicle, an earlier theft of a painting, and an attempted theft of Van Gogh's "Sunflowers." The Hughes family's garage, the Snowdonia Oasis, seems to be at the center of all these events. Initially it is only a gas station, but as the story progresses, it transforms. Or perhaps mutates is more apropos, because Tom (the would-be robber and reformed Oasis employee) is fascinated with the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. His excitement rubs off on Dylan, who sees connections to the Turtles in his everyday life. The Turtles, plus Minnie's desire to lead a life of crime, serve as the children's gateway into the world of classic art and provide an opportunity to stage their own heist.—MM



Medieval fantasy is alive and well in *Dragon's Keep* by Janet Lee Carey (Harcourt). Rosalind is the princess destined to fulfill Merlin's 600-year-old prophecy to restore her family to their throne. However, Rosalind is not the perfect princess her mother expected. The ring-finger of her left hand is a dragon's claw. From the moment of Rosalind's birth, her mother has made it mandatory that she and Rosalind wear golden gloves at all times. All her life on Wilde Island, 14-year-old Rosalind has been subjected to healers, witches, and soothsayers whom her mother brings to heal her (without their knowing what they were healing). Nothing works. As the inhabitants of Wilde Island celebrate May Day, a dragon carries Rosalind to his lair. His mate has been killed, and he needs a server to look after the eggs she left behind. In order to keep the dragon from killing more of her people, Rosalind makes a bargain to serve the dragon and be a nursemaid for his pips if he will spare the lives of the knights sent to rescue her. He swears not to eat another human for as long as she refrains from speaking to people. Ironically, Rosalind's finger, which so disgusts her mother, is the part of her that the dragons find pretty. Rosalind begins seeing herself differently while she labors for the dragon family and comes to care about them. The pips learn the treachery of humans from their father. While his stories sadden Rosalind, she knows that parts of them are true. After Rosalind escapes, she learns that her mother died while Rosalind was living with the dragons. In her mother's place, evil Sir Magnus has taken the throne. Rosalind soon finds herself in a dungeon waiting to be tried as a witch. Merlin's prophecy seems doomed as Rosalind awaits her death. The story moves briskly through frustration, love, hope, anger, hatred, murder, greed, and unexpected acceptance. The plot twists will keep readers from middle grades and beyond turning pages long into the night. – MF



Iris, Messenger by Sarah Deming opens in school the day before Iris Greenwold’s twelfth birthday (Harcourt). As usual, Iris is daydreaming about imaginary people and events. The following day, Iris receives *Bulfinch’s Mythology* from an unknown source. Questions and clues addressed to Iris are written in the margins of her new book. As she reads and ponders, she discovers that ancient Greek gods are living in her town. Poseidon has a clam shack, and when Iris finds him, he tells her he has been instructed to tell her a story about a messenger named Iris who “traveled by sliding down a rainbow.” The next day, Iris receives a shawl in the colors of the rainbow. By reciting the spell Poseidon shared, she can go anywhere! As Iris meets the gods and goddesses, they each have stories for her. Each story helps Iris understand, not only why she *feels* different from other children, but that she *is* different: She is the mortal daughter of Zeus! No wonder the gods and goddesses treat her as an equal. Deming brings the Greek deities to life as she places them in occupations not quite suited to immortal beings. The story, charming and unexpected, adds a new dimension to Greek mythology while sharing the better-known stories of each god and goddess. –MF



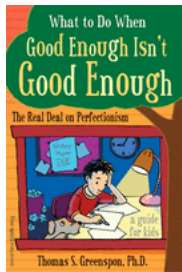
Baba Wague Diakite retells a folktale from Mali, his homeland, in *Mee-An and the Magic Serpent* (Groundwood). Extremely beautiful but also vain, Mee-An vows that she will not marry any man with a “single scratch, scar or blemish on any part of his body.” Her younger sister, Assa, turns into a fly to search far and wide for such perfection, but the quest is impossible. News of Mee-An’s demands eventually reaches a magic serpent, who turns himself into a perfect man. Thrilled at his perfection, Mee-An ignores serious signs of bad luck and agrees to marry him. Assa accompanies the couple to their new home, far away from the village. All goes well until the sisters discover that the bridegroom’s successful fishing results from his prowess as a water serpent and that he is fattening the women for a feast. With the help of a black heron Mee-An and Assa escape to their home, where Mee-An, having learned that “seeing a person is not the same as knowing them,” comes to cherish a husband despite his blemishes. The illustrations add immensely to the tale’s interest and humor. For example, when the serpent arrives at Mee-An’s house, the walls crack, and the birds careen through the sky as they are buffeted by strong winds. –KP

During the Civil War, friends and neighbors in Tennessee joined opposing sides of the war. None of them believed in slavery, although some supported the Confederacy because most of the state opted to do so and those with Northern ties supported the Yankees. Such disparity resulted in savage hatred between neighbors who had once been best friends. Kathleen Ernst in *Hearts of Stone* writes about best friends who not only drift apart but slam apart because of their parents’ beliefs (Penguin). When the war comes to the area, the Yankee children who lost their father to the war and their mother to marauders must cope with the hatred of their neighbors and their own uncertainties. Fifteen-year-old Hannah sets out from Cumberland Mountain with her 10-year-old brother and five-year-old twin sisters to find relatives 200 miles away in Nashville. As they pass their neighbors’ farm, they are stoned. Hannah is crushed because she used to be best friends with 16-year-old Ben. Feeling hurt and humiliated, she and her siblings start the journey that could cost them their lives. When they arrive in Nashville, they discover their relatives have died, so the children scrounge for work to feed themselves. They scavenge for discarded cigars for a tobacco dealer and live in a shed behind his store. Eventually they end up in a refugee asylum and live in a tent during the cold,



bitter winter. While there, they discover ex-neighbors Ben and his 10-year-old sister Sary. Their father also died in the war, and they recently buried their mother. Ben and Hannah tentatively renew their friendship. As they share memories, tragedies, and hopes, they make plans to return to Cumberland Mountain to start life anew in the place where they realize they should have stayed. Ernst writes an interesting book for middle and junior high readers about the Civil War as seen by its innocent victims: the children.—MF

Even though the pressure of school assignments may disappear during summer, for some people the drive for perfectionism leaves them unable to enjoy any activities because of the tremendous pressure they place on themselves. Thomas S. Greenspon explores this problem in *What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough* (Free Spirit). Greenspon's reassuring tone and practical activities should help kids distinguish between wanting to do well and suffering from perfectionism. He offers suggestions for "load lighteners" that can help perfectionists reduce demands they place on themselves and encourages them to have honest conversations with their parents or other adults who may play a major role in fostering perfectionism. He acknowledges that change will not be easy, particularly because many parents are perfectionists themselves and learned their approach from their own parents. In fact, the book contains helpful suggestions for perfectionists of any age who need to change their negative "self-view" so they can gain the courage to try new things and reduce unreasonable demands on themselves. Greenspon also describes various emotional disorders such as depression or anorexia that may accompany perfectionism but which will require professional counseling. Several pages of advice for caring adults and a list of books and websites of professional organizations round out this important volume.—KP



Sally Grindley continues the story of Max, a 10-year-old boy who writes to his favorite author, D. J. Lucas, in *Bravo Max* (Simon & Schuster). Max and D. J. carry on a correspondence in which Max asks D. J. to help him write a play. While D. J. writes a new book, attends book signings, and meets movie stars who will appear in a film adaptation of one of her books, Max wrestles with his demons. Since his father died, Max and his mother have learned to get by together. However, when his favorite uncle gets engaged, and his mother finds a new man in her life, Max must learn to cope with his frustrations. He uses the characters in his play to do so. Illustrated by Tony Ross, *Bravo Max* provides, through letters and postcards, an inside look at an author's life while sharing the growing pains of a faithful reader. The story is charming and laced with humor and poignant observations of life and expectations from Max and D. J.—MF



In the chapter book *Maddie's Big Test* by Louise LeBlanc and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay, Maddie would much rather watch *Road to Stardom* to prepare for a singing career than study math (Orca). Although Maddie's grades have slipped, and her parents have threatened to take away her *Road to Stardom*-watching privileges, Maddie still won't study. When it comes time to take the big math test at school, Maddie's friend teaches her how to cheat. But it isn't as great as she thinks it will be. Maddie states, "I began to have doubts. I started to feel sick. It was if I didn't want to cheat." In the end, Maddie has to make a crucial decision about how to resolve her dilemma. Marie-Louise Gay captures LeBlanc's spunky narrator, Maddie, with endearing and comical illustrations.—T.S.



In the middle-grade novel *How to Steal a Dog* by Barbara O'Connor, Georgina Hayes finds herself in a desperate situation after her family gets evicted from their apartment (Farrar, Straus

and Giroux). Georgina, her mama, and her brother Toby must live in their old car until Mama can make enough money to get them a new place. Georgina and Toby have to go to school without proper showers and must wear wrinkly clothes. When Georgina sees a poster for a missing dog and a reward of \$500.00, she thinks she may have found a way out of the mess. She could steal a dog and claim the reward. Georgina states, “I hated every inch of that car. I put my hands on the steering wheel and pretended like I was driving...And as I drove along, out of Darby, out of North Carolina, on and on and on, as far as I could go, I felt better about what I had to do. I had to steal that little dog, Willy. No matter what.” The plan seems simple when Georgina sketches it out in her notebook but becomes complex after she and Toby steal Willy. O’Connor tells the story from Georgina’s point of view, and her narration will make you laugh and cry. Georgina calls her mother “plumb crazy,” and reflects on her situation at school, “I didn’t belong there with those other girls...I couldn’t buy those bracelets they all wore. They had been over at the mall while I’d been washing my underwear in the bathroom sink at Walgreens.” O’Connor creates a fresh voice and a compelling story worth reading and discussing with children. –TS



Despite the attention devoted to the world’s supply of oil, most people take for granted an even more important resource: water. Rochelle Strauss introduces readers to many vital issues related to the topic in *One Well: The Story of Water on Earth* (Kids Can). She notes that all Earth’s water has been recycled and reused through centuries as part of the water cycle. She discusses the importance of water for plants and animals, including the many creatures that live in lakes, rivers, and oceans. Ultimately, every living creature depends on water, and growing population and rising pollution threaten the supply. Even now, some people have limited access to clean water, and the shortage will be acute within before mid-century.

Rosemary Woods’ illustrations effectively underline the points Strauss makes. For example one picture shows the nine pop cans that represent all Earth’s usable freshwater next to a tanker truck that represents all the planet’s water. The book concludes with suggestions for adults as well as children about what can be done to conserve and protect the water supply.—KP

Books for Young Adults

Broken Moon by Kim Antieau, begins with Nadira writing to her younger brother, Umar, in her journal (Simon & Schuster). It is soon apparent that these siblings are very close, and that Umar has a similar journal in which he writes. The novel gets its title from the scar on Nadira’s face, which plays an important role in the book. She receives that scar, and other less visible ones, from men in retribution for a crime her older brother allegedly committed. Initially, Nadira is ashamed of the scar. In Pakistan such a scar, and the story it tells, makes her undesirable as a wife and marks her as a social outcast. When Umar is sold to men who use children to race camels, Nadira disguises herself as a boy to look for him. Because she’s young and has cut her hair, she fits in fine with the other boys in the camps and soon becomes a storyteller—much like her father, who read to her from *One Thousand and One Nights*. Life improves for the children in her camp, but Nadira never ceases searching for Umar. The treatment of the children is abhorrent, and many of them die. When Nadira does finally find her brother, she also manages to rescue several other children from her camp, but it takes her



winning a camel race and getting the Sheikh to grant her a wish to make it happen. As a hero, her scar now symbolizes her strength and connection with her brother.—MM

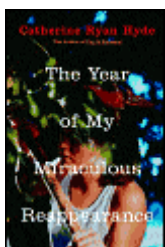
Garage Band is a graphic novel written and illustrated by Italian artist/writer Gipi (First Second). It tells the story of four young men who attempt to form a band and succeed in the music industry. The softness of the watercolor contrasts sharply with the black ink lines of the characters' expressions, and it is clear that Gipi knows his craft. The dialogue throughout is realistic, but the frames without words almost speak louder. The four band members are Stefano, who is overly ambitious; Alberto, who is obsessed with his father; Alex, who is fascinated by the Nazis but does not seem to understand their philosophy; and Giuliano, whose father provides the initial practice area for the band. As the band attempts to write songs, each member is pulled in a separate direction, and soon they have to struggle to get along. Parents and other family members threaten to pull the band members apart. When they have to work together to replace a blown amp, they cooperate for a while. Unfortunately, they decide to solve the problem by stealing a replacement. When they are caught red-handed, the band fizzles until Alex uses money his negligent father sends him to purchase a new garage where they can practice.—MM



In Valerie Hobbs' new book, *Anything but Ordinary*, Bernie and Winifred, unpopular and decidedly different, forge a unique alliance during their last two years of high school (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). They plan for college and a future together. When Bernie's mother dies, however, Bernie's grades drop, and he loses his drive. He starts working in his father's tire shop and disappoints Winifred, who can't understand the changes in him. In spite of still loving Bernie, Winifred leaves New Jersey to attend college in California. She wants to start fresh and find her identity. Her three roommates groom her, from the ugly duckling she appeared to be, into their idea of a smart and savvy coed. When Bernie misses Winifred so much that he drives cross country to see her, he discovers a new Winifred—Wini—a stranger living in the body of the girl he had missed. As Wini adjusts to popularity, parties, and shopping, her grades drop, and she loses her individuality by trying to emulate her popular roommates. Bernie unexpectedly comes alive on the college campus, starts sitting in on classes, resurrects his desire to become a writer, and finds himself at last. In her quest to escape the ordinary, Winifred goes from being a unique and focused young woman to a naïve and mediocre clone of her gossiping roommates. This young adult novel focuses on the pursuit for acceptance many college freshmen seek in their search for popularity and self-identity. Hobbs gives young adults an honest look at college life as her protagonists discover what does and does not matter.—MF



Cynthia, in Catherine Ryan Hyde's *The Year of My Miraculous Reappearance* is an independent 13-year-old with an alcoholic mother and a brother (Bill) with Down's syndrome (Knopf). When Mom is drunk, which is often, Cynthia hides in her tree and takes care of Bill. She also spends her time putting out fires. Sometimes these are literal ones, (her mother often falls asleep with a burning cigarette in her hand), and other times they're figurative, like keeping the peace between her mom and Nanny and Grampop. It is not long before Cynthia follows in her mother's footsteps and starts drinking. Also around this time Nanny and Grampop take Bill from Cynthia and her mother. After building a tree fort with a friend from school, Cynthia attempts to steal Bill and run away. However, this enterprise ends badly with all of them hospitalized after an accident. Cynthia spends the rest of the book learning what it means



to be an alcoholic. With the help of her sponsor, and one of Cynthia's mother's ex-boyfriends, she begins to walk down the road to recovery in an attempt to earn the respect of her grandparents and the right to see her brother again. The book will appeal to readers in junior high and above.—MM

Emily Goldberg Learns to Salsa by Micol Ostow deals with the theme of family acceptance (Penguin). Hearing that her grandmother has died, Emily panics until she realizes that her Jewish grandmother is just fine. Her maternal grandmother, whom she never met, has died in Puerto Rico, and the family flies from New York for the funeral. When they arrive in Puerto Rico, Emily wonders—and then thinks she realizes—why her mother never spoke of these relatives. The Catholic wake and funeral differ a lot from Jewish rituals, and Emily can't get used to the boisterous and large extended set of relations. Eager to leave, Emily learns that her mother wants to remain to start putting back the pieces of her lost family and her roots. Emily must stay with her mother for a couple of months while her father and brother fly home. Mrs. Goldberg and Emily stay with Tia Rosa and Lucy, a teen Emily's age. Having had maids all her life, Emily is not prepared for the work Tia Rosa expects. However, Emily does her tasks willingly and wonders why she hadn't thought to help before. Nevertheless, Lucy resents the spoiled *nuyorican* and pointedly ignores Emily. Stranded in a different country with strange people and missing her friends and boyfriend, quiet and shy Emily tries to adjust to her new family while she and her mother attempt to connect with one another. As Emily continues to meet her gregarious relatives in weekend get-togethers, she realizes that their blood courses through her own veins. Emily struggles with loneliness, homesickness, and lack of acceptance while she discovers both the joy families can bring one another and the pain they can inflict on one another. Young adults will recognize the thoughtless hurts others can cause and the unparalleled joy of acceptance others can create. And they will rejoice when they find the courage to risk dancing their joy in the streets.—MF



The Invisible is Mats Wahl's first novel to be translated into English from Swedish, though he has written over 40 books (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). The story is about Hilmer Ericksson, who disappears one day, and detective Harald Fors' search to find him. Hilmer appears throughout the novel as an invisible observer and, though he is a victim, he works just as hard as detective Fors to figure out what happened to him. The case is a complex one that involves several viable suspects, including politicians and neo-Nazis, but ultimately it boils down to Hilmer's being beaten by his fellow high school students. Hilmer is still alive when a police dog finally finds him, but he does not last long at the hospital. Detective Fors is a complex character, and with the addition of the ghostly Hilmer following his every move, the novel is very unique and well-written. The release of "The Invisible" as a motion picture by the producers of "The Sixth Sense" should generate additional interest in the book.—MM

In *The Rules of Survival* by Nancy Werlin, 18-year-old Matthew writes a long letter to his youngest sister Emmy, explaining the confusing and irrational childhoods they and their middle sister Callie endured (Penguin). Raised by a mother who vacillated between over-indulgence and extreme mental and physical cruelty, Matthew hopes to justify and clarify his past efforts to protect them all in light of their mother's emotional extremes. Although their father lived nearby and sent \$1800 a month to support them, he seemed ineffectual and preoccupied when the children asked for help. Their Aunt Bobbie, who lived downstairs in the house she owned with their mother, turned a blind eye to the parade of



strange men, cocaine, and tirades that their mother regularly inflicted on them. They had no adults in their lives who seemed to care about them or help them during their mother's long absences or when they complained about her nearly killing all of them in head-on car crashes. One day, Callie and Matthew saw a man in a grocery store shake and yell at his pre-school son. A customer named Murdoch grabbed the little boy and stood between him and his father. After several seconds, the father realized what he had done. Then Murdoch bent to the child and told him that nobody should hurt him—ever. That incident was the start of hope for Matthew and Callie. Matthew found where Murdoch lived, and by a twist of fate, their mother started dating him. Although the relationship didn't last, that was the beginning of the end of the children's abuse. Werlin writes a compelling tale of children caught in the darkness of the human spirit and of the emotional turmoil they and the adults around them experience. Young adult readers will find this eye-opening narrative hard to put down. –MF

Book reviews written by:

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

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

MM – Michael MacBride, English Department Teaching Assistant

NS – Natalie Stowe, English Department Teaching Assistant

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

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Aston, Dianna Hutts. *A Seed Is Sleepy*. Illus. by Sylvia Long. Chronicle, 2007. ISBN 0-8118-5520-1. \$16.95.

Ayres, Katherine. *Up, Down, And Around*. Illus. by Nadine Bernard Westcott. Candlewick, 2007. ISBN 978-0-7636-2378-4. \$16.99.

Beck, Ian. *The Secret History of Tom Trueheart*. HarperCollins, 2006. ISBN 0-06-115210-2. \$16.99.

Boyce, Frank Cottrell. *Framed*. Harper Collins, 2007. ISBN 978-0-06-073402-2. \$16.99.

Bruel, Robert. *Bob and Otto*. Illus. by Nick Bruel. Roaring Brook, 2007. ISBN 1-59643-203-9. \$15.95.

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