

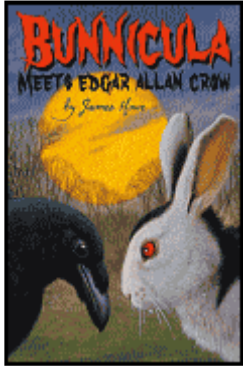
# BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

November 2006

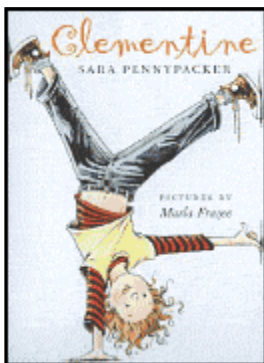
With Halloween just behind us, it seems appropriate to start this issue of Book Notes by looking at the latest installment of James Howe's series about Bunnicula. Although the vampire rabbit doesn't spend much time onstage in *Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allan Crow*, the threat posed to his well-being serves as a driving force behind the action (Simon & Schuster). Once again, Harold, one of the Monroe family's dogs, narrates the tale and tries to suppress the wild speculations of Chester the cat about dangers lurking around every corner. This time the threat arrives in the person of author M.T. Graves, whose *FleshCrawler* books feature gruesome fates that await unsuspecting pets. Following Graves' own pet, Edgar Allan Crow, is a huge flock of other birds, aptly dubbed "a murder of crows." When Graves exhibits an unusual interest in studying Bunnicula, Chester takes drastic action to save his bunny friend. Of course, fans of Bunnicula know that all the suspicious behavior will have a logical explanation by the book's end, but they will enjoy unraveling the mystery while they revisit the nonstop action of the Monroe household.



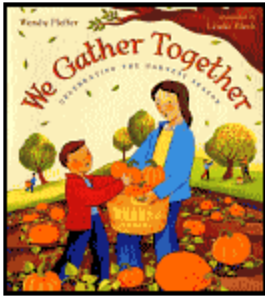
Another canine author is featured in Eileen's Christelow's *Letters from a Desperate Dog* (Houghton Mifflin). Emma seeks the help of Queenie, an online advice columnist, in dealing with her human, an artist named George. E-mail exchanges bring suggestions that don't work out well and earn Emma a continuing chorus of "Bad! Bad! Bad!" Desperate for a change, Emma tries out for a part in the stage show *On the Couch*, which employs her talents such as lounging, dancing, and singing. However, theater life doesn't stop her from thinking of George, and when the show's tour returns to her hometown, she realizes that fame isn't a replacement for friendship. All's well that ends well. . . or at least well enough to set up a possible sequel with more escapades. The format incorporates comic strip panels as well as e-mail messages in text boxes, which makes the story most suitable for sophisticated picture book listeners/readers.



Those who are ready for plenty of humor in a chapter book will relish Sara Pennypacker's *Clementine* (Hyperion). Told in the distinctive voice of third-grader Clementine herself, the series of misunderstandings and missteps at home and school offer plenty of laughs for elementary-school readers. Clementine's efforts to help her well-behaved neighbor and classmate Margaret remove glue from an art project result in disastrous haircuts and dye jobs for both girls. Clementine's artist mother has a studio in their living room, and her father works as the superintendent of their apartment building. The dynamics of school and family as well as Clementine's penchant for disasters recall Beverly Cleary's stories of







September 21. This event marks the end of summer in the northern part of the world, where people begin to harvest crops before winter arrives. Pfeffer explains how harvest traditions originated around the world in agricultural societies. Whether celebrating the yam crop in Nigeria or rice harvest in Japan, people rejoice when they have gathered enough food to last through the coming winter. Pfeffer suggests activities related to the autumnal and vernal equinoxes, provides a recipe for corn muffins, and offers a list of harvest celebrations that students can research themselves.

The shortening days form the backdrop of the bilingual picture book *Tarde de invierno/Winter Afternoon* by Mexican author Jorge Lujan (Groundwood). The deceptively simple text describes a young child who draws a picture on a frosty window. Within the shape of the crescent moon, the mother, who is heading home, fits perfectly until she reaches inside to give a hug that warms the winter day. Mandana Sadat's intriguing illustrations turn the child's face into a moon peering through the frost that dissolves into a radiant smile when the mother draws closer. Even wordless images offer much to ponder as when the winter moon hovers over the cityscape whose vibrant colors drive back the cold whiteness of snow.



In Minnesota author Phyllis Root's story, *Lucia and the Light*, the sun has disappeared entirely, and darkness blankets the world (Candlewick). Even in the Far North, the sun has never stayed away so long. Soon the fire cannot heat the house or bake the bread. Despite Mama's warning about trolls, Lucia decides to set out in search of the sun. Accompanied by her milk-white cat, she heads up the mountain on her skis until she encounters the trolls, who had captured the sun so that they can eat any time they want without having to hide from its rays. Lucia and the cat manage to outwit them and bring light and warmth back to the world. Mary GrandPre lived in Minnesota until recently, which gave her many opportunities to observe snowy landscapes (perhaps not quite this mountainous!) that she used in her pastel illustrations of Lucia's story.



In Sweden Santa Lucia day is celebrated on December 13, but a more familiar holiday occurs later that month. Mark Buehner decided to illustrate Pearl Buck's story, *Christmas Day in the Morning*, after his own children cleaned the kitchen in the middle of the night as a gift for their parents (HarperCollins). They had heard a reading of Buck's story, originally published in 1950, in which a young man awakens early on Christmas morning to milk the cows before his father headed to the barn. It recalls how he had hated to be awakened at 4 a.m. to help with the chores, but the Christmas he was 15, he planned the surprise. Even though getting up before 3 was hard, the tasks went smoothly. "Milking for once was not a chore. It was something else, a gift to his father who loved him." Yes, the story is nostalgic, and the paintings have a Norman Rockwell flavor. However, the underlying message that often the gifts that make the biggest impression are those that can't be purchased for any price.



Carter Goodrich offers an adaptation of a familiar holiday poem in *A Creature was Stirring* (Simon & Schuster). A small boy simply can't sleep even though he knows he shouldn't



be awake when Santa arrives. The left side of each double-page spread includes the words of Clement Moore's familiar account of Santa's visit while the facing page includes rhymed commentary by the little boy. Although he tries to fake sleep, he realizes that Santa hasn't set the parking brake on the sleigh and needs to drive the reindeer to a more secure location. Most of the pages are rather dark, given the night-time setting, which causes parts of Moore's poem to fade into the background at spots. However, most adults reading this aloud will have no difficulty remembering the popular rhyme.

Lauren Stringer explains why she likes the entire season, not just the holidays in *Winter is the Warmest Season* (Harcourt). After all, in winter, people put on warm clothes. They drink hot chocolate and eat hot soup. The cooling fans of summer give way to hissing radiators. Fires blaze, and candles burn. Her energetic acrylic paintings add plenty of warmth and motion themselves. Together words and pictures may make readers who aren't lucky enough to experience cold winters want to pack their bags and head north. Those of us lucky enough to live in Minnesota, like the author herself, will find additional reasons to celebrate.



Certain animals prefer colder climates too, including the features characters in *365 Penguins* by Jean-Luc Fromental and Joelle Jolivet (Abrams). On New Year's Day, one penguin is delivered to an unsuspecting family with the odd note: "I'm number 1. Feed me when I'm hungry." While one penguin seems manageable, their numbers keep growing, with another penguin arriving each day. Soon their presence provides some daunting math problems, such as how much fish to purchase and how to house them in various configurations. The racket and the smell drive neighbors crazy, and by the year's end 364 penguins have taken over the entire house. The arrival of Uncle Victor, the ecologist, provides an explanation. He has sent the birds north because their South Pole territory is shrinking due to global warming. Trucking them to the North Pole, he leaves a quieter household. . . until the next day's delivery: a polar bear! The orange, blue, and gray illustrations give a retro feel to this oversized book. The family's predicament and unlikely solutions generate plenty of amusement.



Jane Cabrera's latest interpretation of a nursery rhyme includes plenty of humor too. *Ten in the Bed* includes a bevy of animals trying to fit in a small space (Holiday House). As they roll over and out, each animal produces a different response based on occupation. The cook supplies an elaborate cake. The ballerina leaps across the quilted stage. The pirate walks a plank, and the astronaut floats into outer space. While reading this book at bedtime probably wouldn't soothe a restless preschooler, sharing it at other times of day would be sure to spark games of pretend.



**Reviewer:** Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

**Books reviewed in this issue:**

Howe, James. Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allan Crow. Simon & Schuster, 2006. Illus. by Eric Fortune. ISBN 1-4169-1458-7. \$ 15.95.

Christelow, Eillen. Letters From A Desperate Dog. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. ISBN 0-618-51003-6. \$ 16.00.

Pennypacker, Sara. Clementine. Illus. by Marla Frazee. Hyperion, 2006. ISBN 07863882-5. \$14.99.

Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road? Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0-8037-3094-2. \$ 16.99.

Gomes, Filomena. My Mom Loves Me More Than Sushi. Illus. by Ashley Spires. Second Story Press, 2006. ISBN 1-897187-09-2. \$ 12.95.

Isaacs, Anne. Pancakes for Supper! Illus. by Mark Teague. Scholastic, 2006. ISBN 0-439-64483-6. \$ 15.99.

Pfeffer, Wendy. We Gather Together. Illus. by Linda Bleck. Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0-525-47669-5. \$ 17.99.

Lujan, Jorge. Tarde de invierno / Winter Afternoon. Illus. by Mandana Sadat. Groundwood, 2006. ISBN 0-88899-718-3. \$ 16.95.

Root, Phyllis. Lucia and the Light. Illus. by Mary Grandpre. Candlewick, 2006. ISBN 076362296-6. \$16.99.

Buck, Pearl S. Christmas Day in the Morning. Illus. by Mark Buehner. HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 0-688-16268-1. \$ 18.89

Goodrich, Carter. A Creature Was Stirring. Simon & Schuster, 2006. ISBN 0-689-86399-3. \$ 16.95.

Stringer, Lauren. Winter is the Warmest Season. Harcourt, 2006. ISBN 0-15-204967-3. \$16.00

Fromental, Jean-Luc. 365 Penguins. Illus. by Joelle Jolivet. Abrams, 2006. ISBN 0-8109-4460-X. \$17.95

Cabrera, Jane. Ten in the Bed. Holiday House, 2006. ISBN 0-8234-2027-2. \$ 16.95