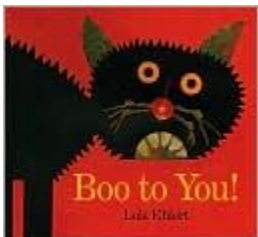


Mysteries

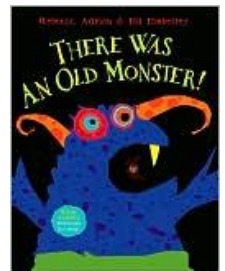
With lengthening autumn shadows and the end of daylight savings time, mystery seems to increase as the year heads toward its close. Disguises hide true identities of people and animals. Events aren't always what they seem at first glance. Plenty of intrigue lurks in the pages of the books chosen for this edition of Book Notes. We hope this introduction to some of our many new titles will encourage you to visit the Center for Children's and Young Adult Books to explore for yourself.

Picture Books



Lois Ehlert incorporates photographs of autumn seeds, fruit, and leaves into her illustration collages in *Boo to You!* (Simon & Schuster). While the field mice make gourd and pumpkin creatures to decorate for their final “harvest party” in the garden, they have to figure out a way to avoid becoming menu items themselves. A huge black cat patrols the area, hiding behind vines and threatening to pounce. After the house lights flick off, the spooky mood is set for a surprising scare for the sneaky feline. A fold-out page reveals a gigantic vegetable monster that the mice have constructed to frighten their nemesis. Ehlert includes a photo identification page which labels the various squash, gourds, vegetables, and other harvest items that appear in her illustrations. Some readers may want to find those components in the individual pictures. Others might want to work with an adult to carve a pumpkin and roast the seeds by following the directions on the double-page photo montage of jack-o-lanterns of all sizes.—KP

There was an Old Monster! who swallowed a tick and then made matters worse by consuming other creatures to solve his growing internal distress (Scholastic). Rebecca, Adrian & Ed Emberley collaborated on this variation of the familiar song about an old lady and a fly. Unfortunately for the monster, once he swallows the ants, they “had him dancing in his pants” with a scritch-scratch. Lizard, bat, jackal, and bear. Nothing can solve the monster’s problem. In one final plot twist, the monster tries to eat a lion—and ends up as a meal himself. Brightly colored illustrations on a black background animate the cumulative rhyme. Red ants crawl across the pages and make a last appearance as they scritch-scratch off the final page. A song to accompany the book can be downloaded, but teachers shouldn’t expect a variation of the familiar tune about the old woman and the fly. Although billed as a “sing along” version, this rendition is more of a rhythmic reading with background beat than a song for group participation. It can, however, offer an interesting variation for a storytime reading of the tale. —KP

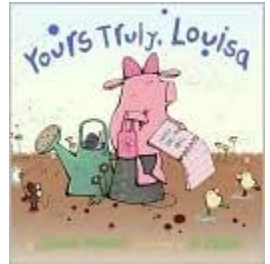


Jennifer Ericsson’s latest book, *Who Goes There?* reminds us that just because most of us are sleeping during the night doesn’t mean there isn’t lots going on (Roaring Brook). Ericsson, along with illustrator Bert Kitchen, presents a wonderful story of what an owl thinks, hears, and sees when in search of its nightly meal. With each

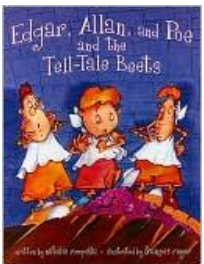


sound, Owl wonders if it is the “fat little mouse just right for dinner.” But each turn of the page reveals a different animal waddling, hopping, or gliding through the bushes below. We learn all the different types of prey that are acceptable to an owl and those that are not, such as the “sharp, pointy quills” on a porcupine. Carefully chosen verbs introduce the readers to animal sounds and provide clues to what animal might be prowling through the night. This book is a great way to introduce or build on current animal knowledge as well as discuss the appearance and traits of the incorporated animals. –GT

Farmer Joe keeps receiving mysterious letters demanding that different aspects of his farm be improved in *Yours Truly, Louisa* (HarperCollins). Simon Puttock creates a pig named Louisa who signs each letter to her farmer as “disgruntled.” For all the efforts farmer Joe puts into straightening up, the complaints just keep coming, even down to improving the dreary color of mud. After having enough of the complaints, he posts his own letter on the side of the barn telling disgruntled that if they don’t like it, then they can clean it up themselves. Louisa, in a huff, decides there is another place that is better than the farm, and hitches a ride to the city. In a “smoky, smoggy, smelly” city, Louisa takes another stab at letter writing. This time she writes that she’ll be returning to the farm because she is sure they must miss her and signs her actual name. A humorous picture of a bucket and scrub brush that awaits her on the farm appears on the final page. Charming illustrations by Jo Kiddie provide additional information about the characters and story unfolding. This is a great children’s book that takes an amusing spin on the message: you don’t know what you’ve got till you’ve lived in a different world. –GT

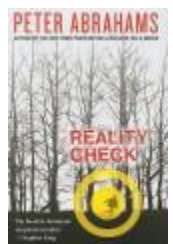


While the terms “Edgar Allan Poe” and “humor” may seem contradictory, Natalie Rompella has created an amusing variation of a well-known tale in *Edgar, Allan, and Poe and the Tell-Tale Beets* (Lobster Press). Faced with unappetizing dishes such as squishy squash and liquidy liver, the three brothers must find a way to clean their plates before they can have dessert. When they discover a loose floorboard under Poe’s chair, they implement their plan to make vegetables disappear. Red, slimy beets go into the hole first. Over the next few days, Edgar, Allan, and Poe dump cold cucumber soup, brussels sprouts, and other concoctions into the hiding place. By Saturday, the boys begin to detect a nauseating stench, although their parents don’t smell anything unusual. Then faintly comes the sound “Beet. Beet. Beet.” The truth eventually erupts in a disgusting vegetable geyser. Francois Ruyer’s cartoonlike characters supply additional humor. Obviously this picture book is designed for readers older than the preschool set. In fact, teachers might pair it with the original story or interpretations such as those offered by Gus Grimly (see review below) to talk about parody. Some students might even be inspired to offer their own interpretations of one of Poe’s classics. –KP

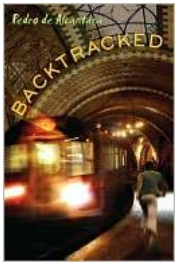


Young Adult Fiction

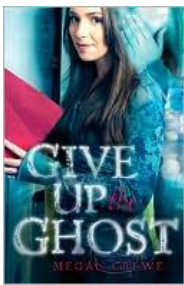
The premise of Peter Abrahams’s novel *Reality Check* is simple: the girl Cody loves is missing, and Cody unravels the clues to discover the blackmailers behind her disappearance (HarperCollins). The story is rendered well in several ways. First, Cody is a well-developed character, one boy in particular will be able to relate to with his love of football and ambivalence about school. The solving of the mystery is also written very well, with a few red herrings to keep the reader guessing. That letter Clea sent the day of her disappearance—is it a clue? Who should be heading the search for her? Who can Clea trust? However, the



story isn't without problems. After a football injury, Cody drops out of school, and since this frees him up to go look for Clea, it turns out to be a good thing in terms of the plot. Cody certainly never expresses any regret over this decision, which may give parents and teachers pause. From a narrative point of view, the story is slow to get going. Clea doesn't disappear until page 81, nearly a quarter of the way through the book, and the ending is abrupt. Clea (and Cody) are rescued, the bad guys are caught, Cody's father appreciates him more now, and Clea's father speaks for the first time since his stress-induced heart attack...all in the last page. And what happens next? Is it just happily ever after? That said, once the story gets rolling, it is very engrossing, and high school students (especially boys) who appreciate the genre will enjoy this book too. —HE



At the beginning of Pedro de Alcantara's novel *Backtracked* (Random House), the main character Tommy Latrella is angry. He's angry that the events of September 11, 2001 claimed the life of his firefighter older brother, but he's even angrier at the selective memory of his family and teachers, to whom he can never measure up or fill his brother's shoes. At his lowest point—about to run away, having just inadvertently caused a bomb scare and put a girl's life in danger—Tommy is swept back in time to 1918. But though this erases his initial set of problems, new ones quickly emerge. As Tommy struggles to navigate this new, alien world, he makes mistakes, but also witnesses great sacrifice, gaining a new appreciation for his true life, waiting in the future. At pivotal moments Tommy is pushed into 1932 and then 1941 before the New York subway, which has facilitated all this travel, brings him home again. The least satisfying part of *Backtracked* is the obvious moral at the end, as Tommy turns over a new leaf, deciding he'll now work hard in school and treat his family better. Despite that aspect, this is a fun read. Alcantara incorporates a great deal of historical information while keeping a fast narrative pace, and 9/11 is a backdrop for the story, but doesn't overwhelm it. The subway works well as a narrative device to keep the story moving and coherent, and the jumps in time are rendered more believably than one might expect. *Backtracked* would work best for middle school students and higher, ones who have studied the Great Depression and World War II at least a little, so they'll experience a shock of recognition when those events are referenced. —HE



Give up the Ghost (Henry Holt) is Megan Crewe's first novel. High School is supposed to be filled with days spent hanging out with friends, discussing weekend plans, and finding a place to fit in. Cass Mckenna has found where she fits...with ghosts. From the time her sister drowned and started floating around her bedroom Cass has been seeing and talking with ghosts. Mornings, afternoons, and weekends are spent in her bedroom where her sister floats about criticizing her on her wardrobe, attitude, and lack of social life. Her days are spent with her only two friends, Norris and Bitzy, two ghosts who roam the halls looking to spy on anyone displaying signs of mischief. Cass uses the information received from her unseen detectives to put those causing harm to others in their place. But when a kid from the most popular group in school seeks her help, suspecting what her abilities are, she might actually find a friend from the most unlikely of social groups. Megan Crewe portrays the themes of death, social pressures, and family life in a gentle yet effective way. This book will sustain its readers' interest as well as leave them pleased with a satisfying ending. —GT

Gus Grimly lends his spooky illustrations to interpret *Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Death and Dementia* (Simon & Schuster). Of the four stories he includes, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is undoubtedly the most familiar and anthologized. The jacket alerts readers to its



inclusion as a buried heart sends streams of red coursing through the walls and windows of a secluded mansion. The illustrations woven into the retellings are more subdued in color but definitely potent in interpreting Poe’s tones of increasing horror and dread as the reader discovers the truth beneath the surface story. In “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether, “ for example, a visitor to a private madhouse slowly realizes that the people with whom he is dining are not the superintendent and his guests but the inmates who had taken over the asylum with a “treatment plan” of their own. The other tales are “The Oblong Box” and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” Creative page layouts and varying type faces and font sizes engage the reader in these slightly abridged versions of Poe’s originals. Whether familiar with Poe or not, readers in junior high and above who have a yen for a scare will appreciate this book, a companion to Grimly’s earlier volume: *Edgar Allan Poe’s Tales of Mystery and Madness*. – KP

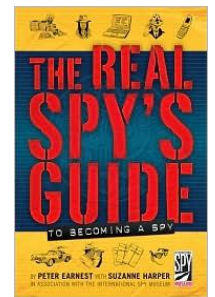
Non-Fiction



In the early years of the twentieth century, one man enthralled crowds in Europe and the United States with his incredible escapes and magic performances. The mystery of how he performed feats such as freeing himself from specially made handcuffs designed to foil him or from a coffin that had been nailed shut and thrown into a harbor may never be revealed. However, young readers who meet him in David and Michael Adler’s *A Picture Book of Harry Houdini* (Holiday House) will probably want to learn more about the fabled performer who was born in Hungary in

1874. Matt Collins’ illustrations fill most of the pages, often extending to double-page spreads. The simple text presents the essential outline of Houdini’s life, including his early fascination with the circus and his drive to create acts that would astound audiences. Adler provides a bibliography and list of websites for those seeking more information about the famous magician. –KP

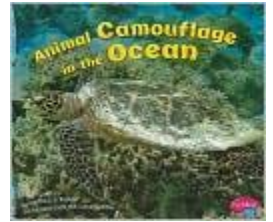
Fictional spies like James Bond lead glamorous lives full of intrigue and danger. Their undercover work takes them to exotic locations where they interact with rich and powerful people. Former CIA operations office Peter Earnest provides extensive and practical information about work in intelligence agencies in *The Real Spy’s Guide to Becoming a Spy* (Abrams). He discusses some of the necessary qualifications a person must have to work for agencies such as the CIA or FBI and explains how to apply for positions. He describes various types of jobs within the organizations and includes anecdotes from the lives of intelligence officers from the past. Many of his suggestions about how to prepare for spying would serve any student in middle school or above well: keep updated on current events, learn another language, improve writing and presentation skills, practice social and observational skills. He explains how each of these qualities comes in handy for intelligence officers. Even students who don’t want to spy themselves will learn a lot of history, vocabulary, and current activities of those involved in espionage from this volume.—KP



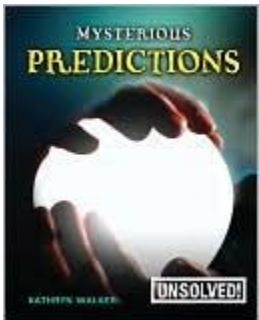
Mysteries don’t all reside in the pages of books. Despite all the explorations that have taken place, there are plenty of natural wonders that have yet to be discovered and studied. Donna M. Jackson introduces readers to three *Extreme Scientists: Exploring Nature’s Mysteries from Perilous Places* (Houghton Mifflin). Through interviews and photographs, we learn how meteorologist Paul Flaherty is

part of a crew that flies into hurricanes to help track the dangerous storms for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We follow professor Hazel Barton into remote caves as she conducts her studies of microbes that survive in extreme conditions. We ascend to the tops of giant redwoods with ecologist Stephen Sillett, whose crew has scaled the tallest living tree: 379.1 feet. All three scientists acknowledge the dangers of their activities but reveal an overriding passion to learn more about the subjects that fascinate them. Upper elementary and middle school students will be intrigued by this new entry in the acclaimed “Scientists in the Field” series. –KP

Humans sometimes don disguises for holidays or to spy on others. Animals’ coloring and shape can help them blend with their surroundings. This capability aids them in hiding from enemies or fooling their own prey. Martha Rustad introduces young readers to animal camouflage in the Hidden in Nature series from Capstone. *Animal Camouflage in the Ocean* (Capstone), for example, includes a pink-and-white seahorse hidden in a coral reef and a flounder that almost disappears in the sand beneath it. The book’s oversize format and large photos offer opportunities for group sharing, discovery, and discussion. Other titles in this Pebble Plus set cover camouflage in the desert, forest, and snow. –KP



Crabtree has come out with a great new series of the Unsolved. *Mysterious Predictions* by Kathryn Walker discusses various times in history when people suggest or predict events that would occur. She goes back as far as 1400 when a peddler named John Capman had a dream of traveling to London’s Bridge to hear good news. Upon arriving a shopkeeper shared his dream of buried gold in the peddler’s home town. Sure enough John traveled back home to find two pots of gold buried beneath one of his trees. Walker reveals the fact that mysterious predictions come in many unforeseen ways such as dreams, nightmares, feelings of anxiety, premonitions, prophecies written long ago, astrology, and even palm reading. Whether you believe in these phenomena or not, reading about the unexplainable coincidences will leave you questioning and shocked. This twelve-title series includes other mysteries about subjects such as the Bermuda Triangle, UFO’s, and the mind. Each book offers further reading, a glossary of new terms, and period photographs enhancing reader understanding. Adding collections such as these in a public library or school media center can offer unique and offbeat topics to capture the interest of reluctant readers. –GT



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GT—Gretchen Turner, CCYAB Graduate Assistant pursuing a master's degree in Library Media Science

HT—Heather Elliot, a second year MFA student in Creative Writing

Books Reviewed in this issue:

Abrahams, Peter. *Reality Check*. HarperCollins, 2009. ISBN 978-0-06-122766-0. \$16.99.

Adler, David & Michael. *A Picture Book of Harry Houdini*. Holiday House, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8234-2059-9. \$17.95.

Alcantara, Pedro. *Backtracked*. Delacorte Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-385-7.419-6. \$15.99.

Crewe, Megan. *Give Up the Ghost*. Henry Holt, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8050-8930-1. \$16.99.

Earnes, Peter. *The Real Spy's Guide to Becoming a Spy*. Abrams, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8109-8-3298. \$16.95.

Ehlert, Lois. *Boo to You!* Simon & Schuster, 2009. ISBN 978-1-4169-8625-6. \$17.99.

Emberley, Rebecca, Adrian & Ed. *There was an Old Monster!* Scholastic, 2009. ISBN 978-0-545-10145-5. \$16.99.

Ericsson, Jennifer. *Who Goes There?* Roaring Brook, 2009. ISBN 978-1-59643-371-7. \$17.99.

Jackson, Donna. *Extreme Scientists*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009. ISBN 978-0-618-77706-8. \$18.00.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *Tales of Death and Dementia*. Atheneum, 2009. ISBN 978-1-4169-5025-7. \$18.99.

Puttock, Simon. *Yours Truly, Lousia*. HarperCollins, 2009. ISBN 978-0-06-136634-5. \$17.99.

Rompella, Natalie. *Edgar, Allan, and Poe and the Tell-Tale Beets*. Lobster Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-897550-17-5. \$19.95.

Rustad, Martha. *Animal Camouflage in the Ocean*. Capstone, 2009. ISBN 978-1-4296-3325-3. \$21.32.

Walker, Kathryn. *Mysterious Predictions*. Crabtree, 2009. ISBN 979-0-7787-4151-0. \$19.95.