

## BOOK NOTES

### Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

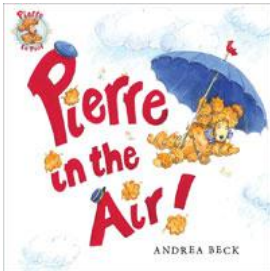
November 2011

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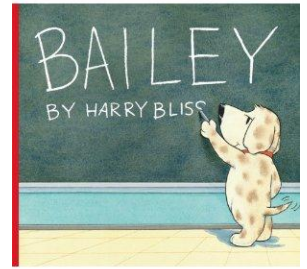
We turned our clocks back last weekend. The last leaves cling to wind-whipped branches. Weather forecasts include predictions of snow. There's no denying that winter is on its way. Whether reading for school assignments or personal enjoyment, children can find plenty to occupy their indoor hours among the books that have been arriving at the Center for Children's and Young Adult Books. The reviews below represent only a few of the dozens of new books filling the shelves. Check out our website at <http://lib.mnsu.edu/collections/ccyab/> to see the monthly lists of new arrivals and link to the sites of our contributing publishers. Better yet, stop by and examine the books yourself. Happy reading!

### Picture Books

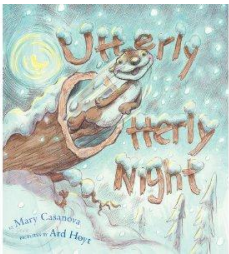
When Miss Murphy informs Pierre that they will be traveling to Paris so that he can appear in a poodle show, he immediately starts imagining the adventures he will have. Daydreams about fabulous French food and a visit to the Eiffel Tower take his mind off the hair trimming that make him "perfectly poofy" for the competition. Unfortunately, while they are in Paris, Miss Murphy leaves him alone every day while she explores the city. On the third day, Pierre manages to escape. A French dog named Coco shows him the sights. Pierre not only makes it to the observation deck of the Eiffel Tower, but he also makes an unusual descent after he grabs an umbrella blown out of a woman's hand by a gust of wind. A photographer snaps a shot of *Pierre in the Air!* (Orca) before his perfect landing. A quick dumpster dive for a snack completes Pierre's adventure. A horrified Miss Murphy cleans him up in time to win the competition. Andrea Beck probably has sequels in mind since her book ends with Pierre planning ahead to the next competition—in Australia. Beck's watercolor paintings create a whimsical personality for Pierre, who can be ruffled as well as carefully groomed. The clothes of some of the French citizens are a bit stereotypical, but all the humans definitely take a back seat to the spunky canine.—KP



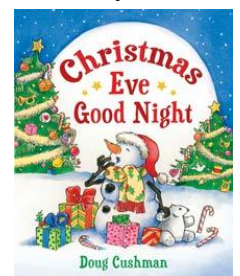
What child wouldn't want Harry Bliss's loveable cartoon dog **Bailey** as a classmate? (Scholastic) Bailey goes through all the routines that an elementary school student would follow from brushing fur to selecting clothes (red or blue collar?) to racing to the bus stop. Yet, despite his participation in school routines, Bailey is definitely a dog. He sticks his head out the bus window. The principal reminds him not to lick anyone. Bailey even has a novel take on the "dog ate my homework" excuse because he ate it himself! By inserting a dog into real school settings, Bliss consistently creates humorous situations. Bailey needs help filling his water dish at the drinking fountain. His class report is about FDR's dog in the White House. Details such as song titles and artwork that all relate to dogs provide independent readers with much to pore over after they have heard the story once and go back to read about Bailey on their own.—KP



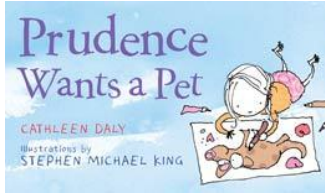
Mary Casanova's Little Otter and his family return for a snowy excursion in an **Utterly Otterly Night** (Simon & Schuster). Leaving their snug den under the river, they venture into a white landscape shimmering in the moonlight. Up hills and down the rambunctious otters climb and slide and play. They manage to elude a hungry owl after Papa shouts a warning. Then Little Otter encounters a greater danger after he climbs to the top of a snowy hill away from the rest of the family. He spies five hungry wolves in the shadowy forest, but his family cannot hear his cries. Can he figure out how to lead the pack away from the unsuspecting otters while letting them know they must escape to the river's open water? Of course he can, proving he really is a "big otter now," as he claims. The family reunites in their cozy den below the river's ceiling. Casanova's invented words such as "whooshily" and "shooshily" capture the otters' actions perfectly. Ard Hoyt's pen-and-ink illustrations reveal Little Otter's emotions from exuberance to terror, but the story never gets too scary for read-aloud listeners.—KP



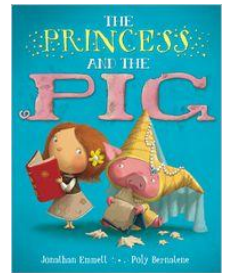
Doug Cushman offers a cozy holiday tale in rhyme in **Christmas Eve Good Night** (Henry Holt). Each double-page spread considers how a different "critter" at the North Pole would say goodnight to a family member or friend. The rhymed text that accompanies the watercolor and ink illustrations reveals that nutcrackers under a tree would probably wish each other "Crack! Crack!" while gingerbread people "Crunch" and doves "Coo." Most of them appear in a final bedroom scene with a sleeping elf. Outside, silhouetted against a full moon, a red-suited man in a sleigh pulled by reindeer offers the most famous "Good night" of the season. Young listeners will enjoy spotting the creatures that have appeared throughout the story in the final overview of bedtime at the North Pole.—KP



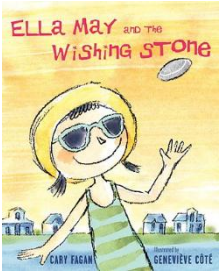
Many picture books feature a child who tries to convince parents that a pet is just what the family needs. Cathleen Daly's heroine is more inventive than most, as she reveals in *Prudence Wants a Pet* (Roaring Brook). Adults offer familiar excuses such as cost of upkeep and undesirable noise. First Prudence adopts Branch, which comes to an unhappy end after Dad trips on it and falls down the stairs. Her next pet, Twig, is so small that it gets lost in the washing machine. Although an old shoe named Formal Footwear accompanies Prudence for a while, she eventually grows tired of its lack of response. Other unsatisfactory pets include her little brother and a car tire before her parents finally give in to her requests. Stephen Michael King's whimsical illustrations concentrate on Prudence's view of the world. With just a few lines, he endows her with a wide range of facial expressions. However, the reader never sees her parents' faces because they appear only from the neck down. Preschoolers will empathize with Prudence's longing and admire her ingenuity.—KP



Jonathan Emmett adds amusing twists to fairy tale conventions in his offbeat story of *The Princess and the Pig* (Walker). As a poor farmer travels home from market, a baby princess falls from the balcony and lands in his hay cart with such force that the tiny pig lying there is catapulted into the castle nursery. The king, well-versed in stories, decides that a bad fairy had turned his daughter into a piglet. When the farmer arrives home with a baby girl, his wife also has an explanation. A good fairy must have rewarded them for their honesty by changing a piglet into a baby. The differences in the lives of Pigmella, the farmer's daughter, and Priscilla, the royal princess, are showcased side by side in Poly Bernatene's cartoon illustrations. The little girl grows smarter and more beautiful while the pig wreaks the havoc anyone would expect of a farm animal. Alas, one day the farmer's wife hears about the uproar in the palace, and her husband figures out what must have happened. He insists that Pigmella go back to her rightful parents. However, the king and queen suspect his story is a hoax to have a commoner gain favor at court. The queen knows that this kind of trick is "the sort of thing that happens all the time in books." In this book, of course, the ending turns out differently. This type of picture book can be appreciated most by elementary school readers who have heard enough fairy tales to know how the stories "should" progress. Along the way the characters hold up volumes with familiar titles. The fun here is knowing more than the people living out the story on the pages.—KP



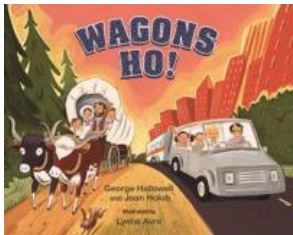
Although owning a special object can set you apart, the price can be high if it means losing friends, as Cary Fagan reveals in *Ella May and the Wishing Stone* (Tundra). The stone that Ella May brings back from the beach has a white line around it, revealing its magic power. After she refuses to let any of her friends hold it, they search for their own wishing stones. She rejects all of them as inadequate. Then enterprising Manuel devises a machine that draws a line around any stone. Suddenly Ella May is left out of the fun while all her friends make wishes of their own. After a soft rain washes away the paint and makes the stones ordinary again, Ella May figures out a way to make some wishes come true by using her imagination. The muted colors and simple figures in Genevieve Cote's illustrations complement the thoughtful story of the ups and downs of friendship.—KP



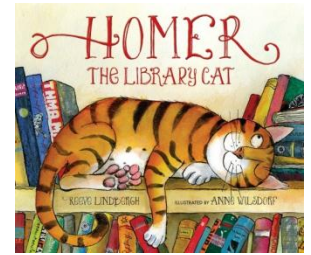
Craig Frazier leads readers through twist and turns in visual perspective as he charts the course of *Bee & Bird* (Roaring Brook). Opening with large bands of black and gold, the book quickly pulls back to reveal a bee on a red background. But wait! The red expanse is not a carpet but a bird's head. The tree on which the bird perches is not growing in a forest but moving in the cab of a pickup truck. What is the sense of scale? Do the blue wavy lines represent an ocean or part of a birdbath? Maybe the answer depends on whether a sailboat skims across a lake or fits into a bicycle basket. From preschool viewers to students of graphic design, readers can explore this wordless picture book forward and backward for multiple interpretations.—KP



In 1846, Jenny and her family take the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City, Oregon, for free land they can call their own. The trip lasts five months. Today, Katie and her family make the same move because her parents have found new jobs. The trip lasts five days. *Wagons Ho!* (Albert Whitman) by George Hallowell and Joan Holub shows how the journeys Jenny and Katie take are very different yet similar in many ways. Jenny has to walk most of the way, while Katie rides in the back seat of the car. Jenny's journey is exhausting and dangerous, with rivers to be crossed, boots that are wearing thin and a limited supply of food, while Katie's trip is mostly boring and annoying. However, both girls have to leave loved ones behind, get to see the same sights like Chimney Rock and Independence Rock, and have pesky little brothers. They layout of the book effectively compares the two girls, with double-page spreads paralleling their journeys. Most informative is the first page, which shows Jenny's 1846 family, where every member is working, and Katie's modern family, where mom's playing tennis, dad's listening to music on the computer and Katie and her brother are squabbling. Even Jenny's cat has a job, to catch mice, while Katie's dog plays with a tennis ball. Lynne Avril's pen and ink watercolor illustrations are kid-friendly cartoons that effectively highlight similarities and differences between Jenny and Katie. A good book for early elementary students to discover how much life has changed since the mid-1800s, and how some things will always stay the same.—JC

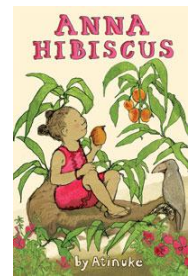
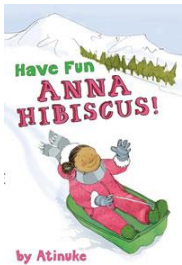


Reeve Lindbergh recounts the journey of a peace-seeking feline who ends up as *Homer the Library Cat* (Candlewick). Homer lives with a quiet lady in a quiet house. Although he's not sure exactly where she goes each day, he is content to stay at home and play quietly with feathers and yarn. One day a loud crash startles him so much that he leaps through the window into a noisy world. No matter where he heads to seek some peace, he encounters noise. At last he enters an elegant building and finds... his quiet lady! Yes, she's a librarian reading to children. Even though the children are not exactly quiet, they all love Homer, who curls up to nap on a bookshelf after he has finished his snack. Anne Wilsdorf's amusing watercolor illustrations take Homer from his peaceful home to a fire station, train yard, and other noisy locations before he finds a place to rest.—KP



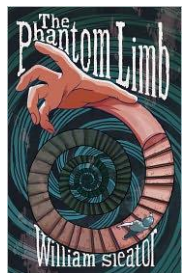
## Fiction

*Anna Hibiscus* is the heroine of a series of books by Atinuke (Kane Miller). Anna lives with her large extended family in a compound situated in an African city. With so many cousins around, Anna never lacks for playmates. The aunts and uncles all have essential roles that contribute to the way the family functions. Anna's mother grew up in Canada and obviously had to adjust to this communal outlook. However, the very first story in the first book reveals the advantages of having many people to look after one another when Anna, her parents, and brothers try to take a vacation by themselves. Before long, everyone migrates from the city to the beach to help the holiday run smoothly. By making Anna's family relatively prosperous and placing them in a city, Atinuke avoids the images of starving Africans in refugee camps or remote tribal areas that often dominate the news. In later books Anna's wish to see snow comes true when she visits her grandmother in Canada. However, her African family makes sure she does not forget them. Atinuke's love for "amazing Africa" and the people who live there shines through the pages and in the character of Anna. The books would be good read-aloud selections since each chapter has a narrative arc of its own while advancing the overall plot.—KP



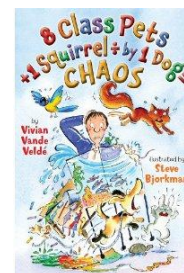
In *Before the Snap*, Derrick has a lot on his mind. His enemy Colton is trying to hurt him on the football field, Colton's ex-girlfriend is smiling at Derrick, and Derrick's ex-girlfriend has just admitted that she's pregnant. In *The Handoff*, Xavier worries about his kid brother following in his footsteps as delivery boy for a drug dealer and decides to try to work his way back onto the track team. Katherine Hengel authors both of these entries from Saddleback's District 13 series for young adults. The series is offered as a high interest stories at the 1.0 to 2.0 reading level. The storylines and characters are believable and suitable for high school students, with vocabulary and sentence structure accessible to struggling readers. Though short enough not to overwhelm the target audience, the issues in both books are brought to conclusions that are both realistic and appropriate.—JC





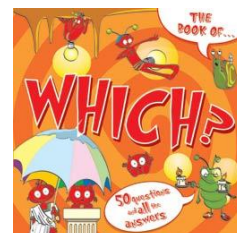
Isaac feels all alone. He's in a new house, in a new town, at a new school. His father is dead, his mother is in the hospital, and the grandfather who is supposed to be watching him is confused and distant. Only his collection of optical illusions keeps him from total despair. However, when the *Phantom Limb* in the mirror box takes on a life of its own, Isaac discovers that his mother is in trouble (Abrams). Only through reaching out to some of the new people in his life and believing the warnings of his mirror box is Isaac able to fight the evil that is threatening her. Authors William Sleator's and Ann Monticone's exploration of optical illusions here is fascinating and will lead many readers to google the ones mentioned in the book, such as the phantom mirror and spiral aftereffect. Though labeled for readers 14 and up, the high squeamish factor and far-fetched situations may appeal more to those in upper elementary and middle school. —JC

While running from an owl, Twitch the squirrel accidentally wakes Cuddles the dog from his nap. Cuddles chases Twitch into School, and Twitch races from room to room, recruiting the classroom pets to help save him from the dog. The result:  $8 \text{ Class Pets} + 1 \text{ Squirrel} \div 1 \text{ Dog} = \text{Chaos}$  (Holiday House). Twitch encounters Miss Lucy Cottontail, who is so smart she went directly to second grade from the pet shop without completing first grade, the neon tetras in third grade who are tickled by the idea that they are a school of fish within a school, and a host of other class pets who try to work together to stop Cuddles. Each chapter is told from the point of view of a different animal, allowing author Vivian Vande Velde the opportunity to capture their unique voices. The chapter narrated by Nancy the art room turtle moves slowly because she keeps falling asleep, while first grade Green Eggs and Hamster keeps repeating himself because his exercise wheel makes him dizzy. The story moves forward at a frenetic pace as Twitch, joined by an ever increasing number of class pets, attempts to escape his pursuer, leaving a wake of destruction in his path. Steve Björkman's pen and ink illustration show the animals on the move, adding to the fast pace of the book. A good chapter book for early elementary readers, this would also be an enjoyable read-aloud for the class.—JC



## Non Fiction

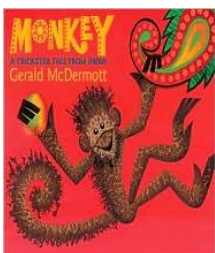
Which is the fastest car? Which is the biggest creepy-crawly? These questions and more are answered in *The Book of Which?*, one of the titles in a series from Kingfisher that includes *The Book of Where?*, *The Book of Who?* and others. Written for upper elementary students, the questions cover a variety of topics from both the natural and human-made world. Funny, comic-type illustrations from Ray Bryant accompany each question, from the coldest planet Neptune wrapped in scarf and hat with snot running from his nose to the suspect line-up of animals that helps readers discover which ones have skeletons on the outside of their body. The faces of the people and the cat that appear in some form on every page, all of whom happen to be red from the top of their head to the tips of their toes, convey a lot of emotion through simple change in expression. All in all, this is a good source of random pieces of information that is fun to browse. (FYI: the fastest car was the British Thrust SSC at 763 mph, and the biggest creepy-crawly was the 13 inch long Indonesian giant stick insect.)—JC



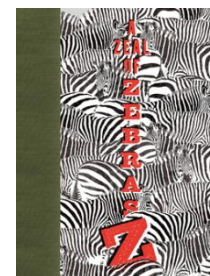
Since the mid-1990s frogs have been dying at an alarming rate in many parts of the world. Minnesota residents first became aware of the situation in 1995 when students at a charter school discovered dozens of deformed frogs in a nearby wetland. About that same time, researchers in Panama noted the steep decline of frogs there, a phenomenon Sandra Markle documents in *The Case of the Vanishing Golden Frogs* (Millbrook). Dubbing the problem, “a scientific mystery,” Markle traces the investigations scientists undertook to identify what was killing the Panamanian golden frog. She reveals the trial-and-error process of eliminating possible causes before scientists identified a fungus in the frogs’ skin that led to sickness and death. Racing against time, scientists captured some of the frogs to save them from extinction, but these survivors are all that remain of the species. No one can predict if a way can be found to ensure their return to their home in the forest. The numerous photos and clear explanations offer middle-grade students plenty of information about the frogs themselves and about the ways scientists investigate problems. Suggested websites and books will satisfy readers who want to learn more about the amphibians.—KP



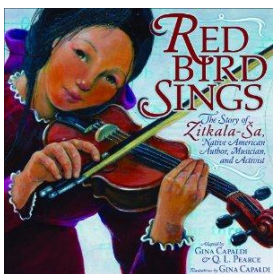
Gerald McDermott completes his picture book series of trickster tales with a story from India about *Monkey* (Harcourt). The title character is determined to reach the mango trees that grow on an island in the middle of the river. Crocodile offers to take him there, but the sneaky reptile sinks lower and lower as he crosses the water since his goal is to drown Monkey and eat his heart. After Monkey convinces Crocodile that he has left the heart in a tree, he returns to the bank safely. The two animals meet again when Crocodile poses as a rock that Monkey uses as a stepping stone to get to the island of mangoes. Once again, the smaller animal outwits the stronger. Monkey sums up the competition by telling Crocodile that his teeth may be sharp, but his mind is dull. McDermott used hand-colored papers, including some from Southeast Asia, to create colorful collage illustrations. He includes source notes for the tale as well as explanations for some of the art techniques he employed. The large images will work well in story time presentations.—KP



The four friends, collectively known as Woop Studios, who designed and created *A Zeal of Zebras* blend playful language and visual imagery (Chronicle). Unusual collective nouns for animals hold a mystique of their own. What lies behind the designation of a group of parrots as a “pandemonium” or a number of gnus as an “implausibility”? The words themselves roll off the tongue. Each double-page spread includes a page of text with a few sentences about the featured animal. The facing page is devoted to a striking visual representation that incorporates the collective noun into a stunning graphic design. Readers of all ages can ponder the depths of a purple ocean where a shiver of sharks pass or follow the dazzling flight of an unkindness of ravens.—KP



Gina Capaldi and Q.L. Pearce have adapted three semiautobiographical stories Zitkala-Sa wrote in the early 1900s into an illustrated biography for middle-grade readers, *Red Bird Sings* (Carolrhoda). Born on the Yankon Sioux reservation in 1876, the year of the battle at Little Bighorn, Zitkala-Sa spent her first seven years with her family and friends in the hills and prairies near the Missouri River. When she was eight years old, she traveled to Wabash, Indiana with Quaker missionaries to attend White’s Manual Labor Institute. Instead of unstructured play, the students had classes and vocational training. Zitkala-Sa loved learning to read and write, but she also missed her family. Yet, when she returned for a visit after three years, she was caught between two worlds. She felt as though she was “neither a wild Indian nor a tame one.” She returned to the institute, where she excelled at music and public speaking, pursuits she continued at Earlham College. As a teacher and musician, she worked to promote Native American causes among the Anglo population. Keeping first-person perspective, Capaldi and Pearce allow Zitkala-Sa to tell her own story. The large, dramatic illustrations help reinforce the struggles she experienced in trying to fit in both worlds while never feeling completely at home in either. The authors finish her life story after the illustrated portion ends. They also supply source notes and a bibliography for those who want to learn more about this fascinating woman and her times.—KP



## **Book Reviews written by:**

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

JC –Jennifer Christianson, CCYAB Graduate Assistant

## **Books Reviewed in this issue:**

Atinuke. *Anna Hibiscus*. Kane Miller, 2010. ISBN 9781935279730. \$5.99.

Atinuke. *Good Luck Anna Hibiscus!* Kane Miller, 2011. ISBN 9781610670074. \$5.99.

Atinuke. *Have Fun Anna Hibiscus!* Kane Miller, 2011. ISBN 9781610670081. \$5.99.

Beck, Andrea. *Pierre in the Air!* Orca, 2011. ISBN 9781554690329. \$19.95.

Bliss, Harry. *Bailey*. Scholastic, 2011. ISBN 9780545233446.\$16.99.

Capaldi, Gina and Q.L. Pearce. *Red Bird Sings: The Story of Zitkala-Ša, Native American Author, Musician, and Activist*. Lerner, 2011. ISBN 9780761352570. \$17.95.

Casanova, Mary. *Utterly Otterly Night*. Illustrated by Ard Hoyt. Simon & Schuster, 2011. ISBN 9781416975625. \$16.99.

Connor, Jo. *The Book of Which?* Kingfisher, 2011. ISBN 9780753465998. \$7.99.

Cushman, Doug. *Christmas Eve Good Night*. Henry Holt, 2011. ISBN 9780805066036. \$12.99.

Emmett, Jonathan. *The Princess and the Pig*. Illustrated by Poly Bernatene. Bloomsbury, 2011. ISBN 9780802723345. \$16.99.

Daly, Cathleen. *Prudence Wants a Pet*. Illustrated by Stephen Michael King. Roaring Brook, 2011. ISBN 9781596434684. \$16.99.

Fagan, Cary. *Ella May and the Wishing Stone*. Illustrated by Geneviève Côté. Tundra, 2011. ISBN 9781770492257. \$17.95.

Frazier, Craig. *Bee & Bird*. Roaring Brook, 2011. ISBN 9781596436602. \$16.99.

Hallowell, George and Joan Holub. *Wagons Ho!* Illustrated by Lynne Avril. Albert Whitman, 2011. ISBN 9780807586129. \$16.99.

Hengel, Katherine. *Before the Snap*. Saddleback, 2012. ISBN 9781616515812. \$5.50.

Hengel, Katherine. *The Handoff*. Saddleback, 2012. ISBN 9781616515836. \$5.50.

Lindbergh, Reeve. *Homer the Library Cat*. Illustrated by Anne Wilsdorf. Candlewick, 2011. ISBN 9780763634483. \$15.99.

Markle, Sandra. *The Case of the Vanishing Golden Frogs: A Scientific Mystery*. Lerner, 2012. ISBN 9780761351085. \$29.27.

McDermott, Gerald. *Monkey: A Trickster Tale from India*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011. ISBN 9780152165963. \$16.99.

Sleator, William and Ann Monticone. *Phantom Limb*. Abrams, 2011. ISBN 9780810984288. \$16.95.

Studios, Woof. *A Zeal of Zebras: An Alphabet of Collection Nouns*. Chronicle, 2011. ISBN 9781452104928. \$17.99.

Vande Velde, Vivian. *8 Class Pets + 1 Squirrel ÷ 1 Dog = Chaos*. Illustrated by Steve Björkman. Holiday House, 2012. ISBN 9780823423644. \$15.95.