

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

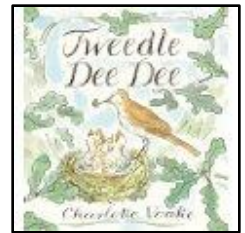
Minnesota State University, Mankato

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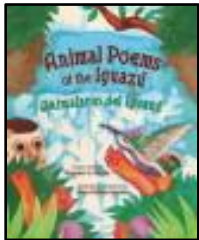
Poetry Books

Although we usually concentrate on poetry books during National Poetry Month in April, we decided to take a break from the pumpkins, turkeys, and autumn leaves surrounding us now to consider some of the humorous, serious, and thought-provoking books of poems that have arrived at the CCYAB during 2008.

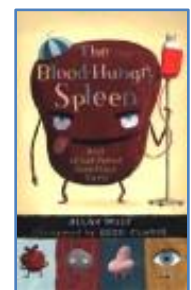
Although we're heading into winter, it's not too late for a touch of spring as we venture into the woods with Charlotte Voake's Tweedle Dee Dee (Candlewick). A boy, a girl, and their black cat enjoy a picnic under the limbs of a gigantic tree. High above them a pair of squirrels frolic while a bird carefully guards the three eggs in her nest. The text is the cumulative "Tree Song" which culminates with the hatching of the voracious baby birds in the nest on the branch on the tree in the wood where the green leaves "grew around, around, around, and the green leaves grew around." The musical score is provided inside the back cover to facilitate singing as well as reading. Voake's cheery pastel watercolor and ink illustrations create a pleasant if somewhat idealized landscape, and the oversize format will allow read-aloud or sing-aloud participation.—KP



Francisco X. Alarcon's Animal Poems of the Iguazu (Children's Book Press) feature the plants, animals, and natural wonders of Iguazu National Park. This large expanse of rainforest, which includes parts of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, faces environmental pressures that could lead to the decline or extinction of some species. Each brief poem gives voice to one component of the area, including some of the human visitors who appreciate the wild beauty of the river and waterfalls. Spanish and English versions of the poems appear side by side, incorporated into Gonzalez's colorful illustrations. Bright detailed paintings of animals against cut-paper forest backgrounds help readers visualize the tropical landscape. The volume would work well for exploring the environment as well as language.—KP



Whether used for its creative poetry, a life-science lesson, or pure pleasure, The Blood-Hungry Spleen and Other Poems About Our Parts (Candlewick) by Allan Wolf, will intrigue anyone. Wolf has been able to innovatively produce a smooth poetic sound in describing body parts, even one as gory as a spleen. Many of his poems cleverly speak of relationships among body parts that occur even during simple daily activities. The poems generate appreciation for how your ears work as a team in holding up your glasses, how they pull together sounds so you don't miss a beat, and how lips come together to create new sounds. Wolf builds rhyme while taking into account all the personal feelings body parts acquire when they are "on



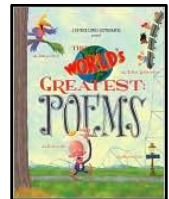
the job.” Having compassion for your toes which are crammed into a shoe all day or for your nose that sticks out to buffer you from an oncoming door are all part of the creativity of this book. Greg Clarke creates cartoon-like body parts illustrating Wolf’s inventive metaphors. Characters paddle down flowing rivers (arteries), and the heart becomes a strapping percussionist pounding on its bass drum. Wolf’s use of personification is also shown through Clarke’s cartoons, placing the stomach and heart on treadmills as runners and dressing the hungry spleen up with a fork and knife chasing after blood cells. Learning is humorous and enjoyable when teachers use this type of resource. A life-science or human development discussion won’t be as embarrassing when it includes these poems and illustrations.—GT

J. Patrick Lewis pairs original poetry with vintage photographs taken by Matthew Brady and his associates during the Civil War in The Brothers’ War (National Geographic). Stark

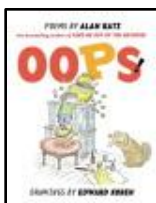


images of people and places affected by that conflict face Lewis’ poignant lines that speak of heroism, suffering and loss. He gives voice to famous men, such as John Brown, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Frederick Douglass, as well as unnamed slaves, soldiers, and family members far from battle. The poignant juxtaposition of letters from a West Virginia father asking his soldier son to come home and his son trying to hold on to hope while imprisoned in Andersonville demonstrate the longing for family that existed on both sides of the conflict. Lewis provides author’s notes to explain the background of each poem as well as a bibliography for those who want to learn more about the war. A map of battles and a timeline of major events add to the book’s usefulness. The haunting photo of a survivor staring straight ahead as his stumps of arms hang at his side reminds readers of war’s ongoing price.—KP

Lewis adopts a much lighter tone in The World’s Greatest: Poems (Chronicle). No, he doesn’t claim that his poems are the greatest. He provides a humorous look at such record holders as the tallest roller coaster, the biggest potato, and the shortest street. Not only do Keith Graves’ illustrations add plenty of eye-catching humor in themselves (as in a basket full of cobras waiting for a kiss), but some poems are designed to relate visually to their subjects. For example, the lines about Pisa’s Leaning Tower stack up at an angle that mimics the “crookedest building’s” slant. The initial letters of each line in the poem about the stone skipping record spell out the answer to the number of times the stone touched the water. These touches invite a second look as well as a second listen.—KP



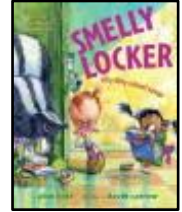
From the highly acclaimed author of Take Me Out of the Bathtub comes an entertainingly laugh-out-loud collection of poems. OOPS (Simon & Schuster) by Alan Katz delivers over a hundred short poems. Except for the cover, Edward Koren’s drawings are in black and white and don’t just accompany each poem but help with the meaning and emphasis of the words. Many of the poems’ situations lightheartedly revolve around poking fun or teasing their characters. These



characters include a sister who thinks that the washing machine is a TV, a boy who won’t wash his belly button because it has no purpose, and a grandpa who creates a pool from drool in his sleep. Katz’s messages addressed to the reader give delight to each poem’s surprise ending and make a person feel part of the creative process. Also included are title and first-line indexes to make finding favorites easy. By

amazingly encompassing so many aspects of life, and at the same time employing various poetic styles, Katz makes sure that anyone will enjoy reading this volume.—GT

Writing parodies of familiar songs is more difficult than it might appear, but Alan Katz has shown his mastery of the technique in volumes such as I'm Still Here in the Bathtub. He returns with Smelly Locker: Silly Dilly School Songs (Simon & Schuster) to tackle such topics as homework, class picture day, recess, math class, and tests. The tunes should be familiar enough that most people can try to sing the new versions although they may require some nimble reading such as the central lines of one verse about a smelly locker (sung to the tune of "Frère Jacques"). "Smelly locker!/ Smelly locker!/ Real Bad Scene!/ Hurts my spleen!/ Shoulda got permission/ to put my dead pet fish in./ Time to clean!/ Time to clean!" David Catrow's slightly zany characters populate the illustrations, which reinforce the absurdity of the lyrics. The creatures rising off the trays and on the table of the lunchroom will make anyone think twice about venturing there at noon.—KP

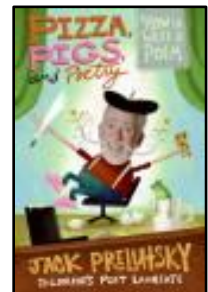


Hamster, Shells, and Spelling Bees offers a kinder, gentler look at school with a series of



poems selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins for beginning readers (HarperCollins). The selections are shorter, with an accompanying illustration that provides context for the subject under consideration. However, that doesn't mean the 20 poems by different authors lack humor or variety. Janet Settimo speaks as a returning student to describe the problem of "Hamster Math" that occurred over the summer she agreed to keep the creatures at home. Somehow the two "furry, friendly guys" managed to multiply into 24 hamsters filling her room. Poems range from a celebration of art class to "The Eraser Poem" that cleverly diminishes as its creator rubs out a letter at a time. Sachiko Yoshikawa's upbeat illustrations add lots of positive energy.—KP

In 2006 Jack Prelutsky was honored as the first recipient of the Children's Poet Laureate award. With the establishment of this new award, the Poetry Foundation hopes to create more awareness of the child audience. Prelutsky will serve for two years as Consultant in Children's Poetry to the Poetry Foundation. As Children's Poet Laureate, he has engaged in projects and speeches devoted to inspiring love for poetry in young readers. After talking to thousands of kids, Pizza, Pigs, and Poetry (Greenwillow) came out this year, as Prelutsky noticed the most asked question was where he got his ideas. This book is an explanation on how to write a poem and where to find ideas. He provides a personal poem to illustrate each of his 20 different tips. He draws from his own child experiences which readers will understand and relate to such as enduring his mother's "inedible" cooking, taking a trip to the zoo, playing tricks on family members, and having his brother shave a teddy bear. Inserts are included throughout the book defining poetic devices in a comprehensible manner. This book seems to cover every problem a struggling poet may come across and provides strategies to get through. Included are 10 starter poems for you to complete in the event you can't even get that far in your ideas. A glossary of terms with examples and an index conclude this book which provides a terrific resource for any student, teacher, or future poet.—GT

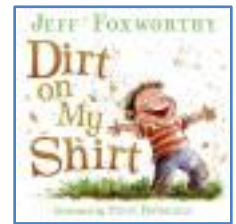


Jack Prelutsky brings back the wonderful adventures of Awful Ogre in Awful Ogre Running Wild (Greenwillow). He gives the reader an eccentric perspective on how an ogre community lives. This collection of poems reveals just how extraordinarily entertaining the ogre world can be. Eating dragon-scale stew, giving the thorniest flowers because it is the norm, and getting a dragon to flame your bread when your toaster breaks are all normal ogre behaviors.



Each poem creates a small tale of Awful Ogre on another adventure causing chaos. For an oversized ogre, a simple trip to the zoo scares even the ferocious lions and knocks down trees and cages. Even a common sneeze sends cascading effects on all the living creatures in the surrounding land. Paul O. Zelinsky uses full-color illustrations to provide specific detail to each page. An Awful Ogre sneeze propels little gnomes to hang on for dear life, and a dive in the pond sends a tsunami-like wave to neighboring creatures. With creative storylines and entertaining illustrations one will not want Awful Ogre’s story to end.—GT

“How much longer?” the children cried./ “A while!” their dad said with regret. / “We haven’t left the driveway yet!” Common family experiences are depicted through hilarious poems in Dirt on My Shirt (HarperCollins). Jeff Foxworthy, comedian and host of *Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader*, has written his first children’s book. “My grandma puts on lipstick/ It’s bright red like a rose/ Because she cannot see too well/ It ends up on her nose!” Filling his poems with this childlike honesty, Foxworthy creates warm and friendly stories around family members, pets, and friends. Sharing a bed with cousins is hard when they sing, toss and turn, snore, and then a dog comes in a pulls off the covers. Equally hard is finding a snake in the garden and trying to get your dad to remove it, even though he is genuinely terrified to tackle the situation. Steve Bjorkman surrounds each poem with comical illustrations adding further amusement to these everyday activities. Grandma has oversized Hollywood star glasses and bright red lipstick covering more than her mouth and much of her nose. Foxworthy’s book is sure to become a bedtime favorite.—GT

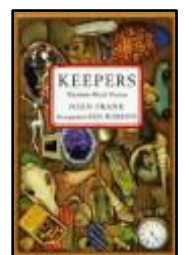


Miss Stretchberry and Jack have both moved up a grade in Hate That Cat by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins), a sequel to Love That Dog. Still intrigued by poetry, Jack resists the idea of a new pet in his life after the death of his dog Sky. He emphatically hates cats, especially the fat black cat that torments him at the bus stop. However, over the course of his poetic journal entries, Jack notes the number of poets who own and/or write about cats. He also expands his



poetic knowledge and experiments with the use of assonance, onomatopoeia, metaphor, and other tools of poetry. After he receives a kitten for Christmas, Jack not only incorporates his observations of the frisky feline into his poems, but he also revises his opinion of the fat black cat. Once again, Miss Stretchberry introduces poems to challenge her students’ imaginations, and many of the originals can be found at the end of the book. Even if readers aren’t inspired to take up poetry writing themselves, they’ll be intrigued by Jack’s story.—KP

John Frank’s poems encourage readers to look more carefully for treasures they might encounter in unexpected places in Keepers: Treasure-Hunt Poems (Roaring Brook). His foreword considers what makes an object a “treasure.” He concludes that the value we place on an object comes not only from its rarity but also



from the thrill of finding it ourselves. Buying a rare baseball card from a dealer lacks the excitement of discovering it in a shoebox in a spare closet. His poems bring to life such moments at the beach, in the attic, in the mountains, and at a flea market. He speculates about the people and natural forces behind the objects we value. Ken Robbins' photographs document some of the treasures Frank describes, such as rusted Matchbox cars and an abalone shell. A book to inspire quiet reflections.—KP



Isabelle Arsenault uses striking graphic design to offer visual interpretations of seven of Emily Dickinson's poems in My Letter to the World and Other Poems (Kids Can). This small format book for older readers incorporates representations of the poet herself, dressed in white, in dream-like landscapes that reflect the enigmatic quality of much of Dickinson's verse. Among the haunting images is the journey with Death through shadowy streets with ghostlike figures hovering above tall buildings, past an autumn-colored field in which other people gaze at the passing carriage, to a pure-white house where Eternity resides. Using color sparingly, Arsenault creates a surrealistic world that challenges readers to consider the poems and illustrations carefully. In fact, on first reading, the poems may seem to run into each other, except for the subtle change in type and color of the first word of each. Notes on the work of Dickinson and Arsenault appear after the text, providing additional information that encourages another look at the work of both women.—KP

Margarita Engle's poems introduce readers to some of the participants in Cuba's three wars against Spain in the second half of the 19th century to secure independence for the island. Although Spain ultimately lost control in 1899, rule over the country was handed over to another colonial power, the United States at The Surrender Tree (Henry Holt). Among the people who speak in these poems most often are Rosa la Bayamesa, a healer who provided medical care in caves and hidden forest locations, and her husband José Francisco Varona, who helped protect these clinics. Rosa used herbal remedies to treat the ill and injured throughout the ongoing conflicts—fugitive slaves, peasants, soldiers, guerilla fighters. Her care for the rebels incited the hatred of many, including Lieutenant Death, a slave hunter who pursued her unsuccessfully for years. Because concrete information about these people and others involved in the wars is limited, Engle uses her imagination to describe their actions, thoughts, and feelings. She also creates a young peasant, Silvia, who manages to escape from a “reconcentration camp” to find Rosa and learn the traditional ways of healing. Historical notes and a timeline at the end of the book provide factual information about Cuban history during this turbulent period.—KP



Books Reviewed written by:

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

GT—Gretchen Turner, CCYAB Graduate Assistant

Books Reviewed in this issue:

Alarcon, Francisco X. *Animal Poems of the Iguazu*. Childrens' Book Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8923-9225-4. \$16.95.

Creech, Sharon. *Hate That Cat*. HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-143093-0. \$16.89.

Dickinson, Emily. *My Letter to the World and other Poems*. Kids Can Press, 2008. ISBN 978-1-55453-103-5. \$17.95.

Engle, Margarita. *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom*. Henry Holt, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8050-8674-4. \$16.95.

Foxworthy, Jeff. *Dirt on My Shirt*. HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-120846-1. \$16.99.

Frank, John. *Keepers*. Roaring Brook, 2008. ISBN 978-1-59643-197-3. \$17.95.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett, ed. *Hamsters, Shells, and Spelling Bees: School Poems*. HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-074112-9. \$16.99.

Katz, Alan. *Smelly Locker: Silly Dilly School Songs*. Simon & Schuster, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4169-0695-7. \$16.99.

Katz, Alan. *OOPS!* Simon & Schuster, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4169-0204-1. \$17.99.

Lewis, J.Patrick. *The World's Greatest: Poems*. Chronicle, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8118-5130-5. \$16.99.

Lewis, J.Patrick. *The Brothers' War: Civil War Voices in Verse*. National Geographic, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4263-0036-3. \$17.95.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Awful Ogre Running Wild*. Greenwillow, 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-623866-1. \$17.99.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Pizza, Pigs, and Poetry: How to Write a Poem*. Greenwillow, 2008. ISBN 978-0-06-143449-5. \$16.99.

Voake, Charlotte. *Tweedle Dee Dee*. Candlewick Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7636-3797-2. \$16.99.

Wolf, Allan. *The Blood-Hungry Spleen: and Other Poems About Our Parts*. Candlewick, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7636-3806-1. \$8.99.