

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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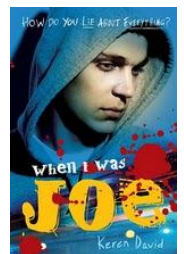
In this issue of *Book Notes* we are featuring fiction. From chapter books for children just starting to read on their own through read-aloud choices to young adult novels, the CCYAB has shelves of the latest fiction that users can browse and enjoy. Rather than trying to divide the titles in this issue by age or reading level, we have tried to indicate that information in the reviews themselves. For our next issue, the last of 2010, we will highlight nonfiction resources. Until then, happy reading.

Fiction

Creating a distinctive voice in a title with a third-grade reading level is a challenge J. Bancherus masters in his series about the grade-school detective Klooz (Stone Arch). In his latest episode, *Stage Fright*, he investigates why all the actors selected to play the lead role in a class play suddenly decide to quit after a scene in which they disappear through a trap door. Refusing to provide details about their decision, they leave the teacher/director at her wits' end. Despite Klooz's reservations about taking a case for a teacher, he agrees to get to the bottom of the mystery. The bottom eventually means beneath the stage, where Klooz figures out the scheme hatched by the theater's caretaker and the ticket seller to get her son the lead role in the production. Along the way, Klooz conducts interviews and gains tips from people in the neighborhood. Both the vocabulary and the mystery itself work well for the target reading audience of upper elementary grade readers. Those who enjoy this entry will probably ask for others in the series as well.-KP

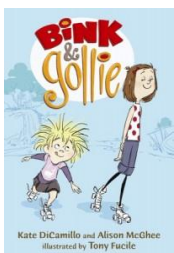


After 14-year-old Ty witnesses a murder, he and his mother Nikki are forced to leave the city and enter witness protection. Through dyed hair, brown contact lenses and a new birth date that makes him one year younger, Ty becomes Joe in the thriller *When I Was Joe* (Frances Lincoln). Where Ty was shy, socially awkward and academically mediocre, Joe is smart (having learned all his subjects the year before at his old school), good looking, and instantly popular. As Joe, Ty tries to blend in, but can't help but stand out. He attracts the attention of the popular girl, angers a bully, and discovers a talent for track that he had never recognized. Living daily with the fear of being found out, he also discovers an angry, violent part of himself. The only piece of Ty's old life he has left, his mother Nikki, begins a transformation of her own. Previously fun, youthful and outgoing, Nikki becomes depressed at the loss of her former life. Ty loves his new existence, but with the combination of his anger, Nikki's depression, and the continuing threat to his life, he may not be able to continue being Joe. Author Keren Davis' exploration of identity will especially appeal to



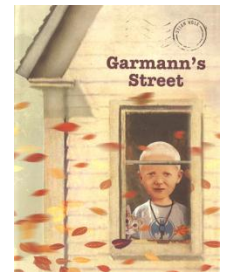
the target 12- to 15-year-olds, who are themselves in the often painful process of forming their own identities. Ty/Joe's voice is strong and clear, and the writing is straightforward and fast-paced. Because the book is set in England, American readers may be distracted by some of the vocabulary and will have little context in which to understand the references to the London knife-violence epidemic. Fair warning: This book does not resolve all the issues it raises, and it is only as the book ends that the reader discovers there will be a sequel. –JC

Bink & Gollie may be best friends, but they appear to be complete opposites except for their love of pancakes and roller skating (Candlewick). Short, spiky-haired Bink plunges into situations without thinking of consequences. She lives in a cottage at the bottom of a huge tree,



where a spiral staircase leads to the ultra-modern dwelling of tall, elegant Gollie. The girls' world is uncomplicated by reality such as parents or siblings. The three chapters deal with different aspects of friendship. When Bink buys a pair of socks so bright that they offend the fashion-conscious Gollie, the friends must reach a compromise before they can share their favorite meal. In the second episode, Bink learns that Gollie needs some private time but will eventually want to share her day with her friend. In the last story, Gollie has to overcome her jealousy when Bink lavishes attention on her pet goldfish. The large illustrations by Tony Fucile and spare text by Minnesota authors Kate DiCamillo and Alison McGhee combine into a book that offers a good transition from picture books to chapter books for beginning readers. -KP

As with his first Garmann book, *Garmann's Summer*, Stian Hole's ***Garmann's Street*** (Eerdmans) initially seems to be a children's book written more for adults. It is sometimes scary, addresses mature themes and contains illustrations that are not kid-friendly. A closer look reveals that this is one of the more honest children's books out there. The text and illustrations reflect, sometimes with painful accuracy, life through the eyes of one lonely six year old. It's autumn, and on Garmann's Street we find characters from many of our own childhoods: Roy, the fourth grade boy who excels at everything and is something of a bully; the twin girls who whisper secrets to each other and worship Roy; and the reclusive Stamp Man whose house sits in an overgrown yard. It's a fire in the Stamp Man's yard, accidentally set by Garmann when taunted by Roy, that changes everything. Roy, who is large, looming and dark when offering matches to Garmann with chewed-nail fingers, is shown to be a coward when he runs from the fire. The subtle halo of light shining around Roy's head no longer appears in any pictures of him and the twins no longer admire him. We first see The Stamp Man at the fire, distraught, then enraged. When he calms down, he grudgingly admires Garmann for not running away. Garmann uses this as an opening to begin visiting the Stamp Man, and they become friends, sharing an interest in flowers and numbers. Garmann is no longer lonely, but the relentlessly honest text and the images of autumn coming to an end make sure to remind us of the Stamp Man's mortality. Children are smarter

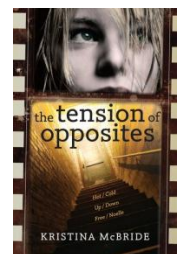


and more complex than many children's books suggest. This book recognizes children's unique world view and ability to confront difficult issues. The illustrations in this book, digital images reimaged by Stian Hole using Photoshop, are incredible. People look the way Garmann sees them, wrinkles, nose drippings, torn cuticles and all. In addition, there are enough visual details and imagery in the pictures to keep children and adults looking for a long time. – JC

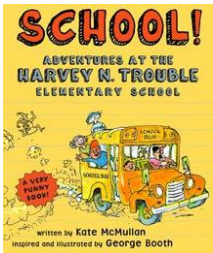


None of the children in the Willow family is particularly happy about their move from their familiar city neighborhood to an isolated house in the country. Abner, Derek, and Tate grow even more unhappy when their latest hamster escapes because they know their parents won't let them have a larger pet until they prove they can care for a small one. They blame Celia, the youngest in the family, for the hamster's disappearance. However, after she not only finds Hammy but also discovers he can talk, the children face a dilemma. Perhaps the creature can work some *Hamster Magic* if they agree to release him. (Random House) Unfortunately, the small hamster has only enough power to grant a single wish. When Celia unthinkingly expresses her exasperation at being the smallest by requesting a desire to be "big," Hammy's energy turns her into a big . . . hamster! He can grant only hamster-related wishes. The three older children have to keep Celia's transformation from their parents until they can figure out how to return her to being a girl. Lynne Jonell infuses these exchanges with plenty of humor. Eventually the children manage to convince the Great Hamster to summon all the underground woodland animals to work together for Celia's restoration. The book's ending hints at sequels as the children speculate about the "magic coming up from the ground" on Hollowstone Hill. This chapter book will appeal to elementary students making the transition to longer chapter books. Brandon Dorman's black and white drawings appear every few pages.—KP

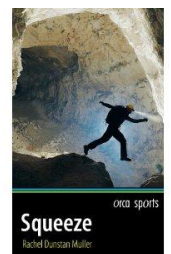
In *The Tension of Opposites* (Egmont), 16-year-old Tessa's life was put on hold two years ago when her best friend Noelle was kidnapped. Not wanting to get that close to anyone again, Tessa doesn't allow herself to have good friends, and she ignores any attraction she has toward boys. The only interest in which she lets herself fully participate is photography, but she won't share her pictures with anyone. Two years later, the impossible happens, and Noelle returns. Tessa is excited to have her best friend back and hopes she can finally get on with her life, but Noelle is now Elle, and she has changed. Just as Tessa allows herself to begin a relationship with fellow photographer Max, she willingly becomes enveloped in Elle's problems and drama. Tessa needs to learn to become friends with the new Elle, and she needs to discover that she has the right to a life of her own. Author Kristina McBride has nailed the often irrational (from an adult perspective) intensity of adolescence. Tessa's angst about letting anyone see her photographs is painfully authentic. This book deals with mature themes, especially Noelle's experiences in captivity, without being overly gratuitous with details. -JC



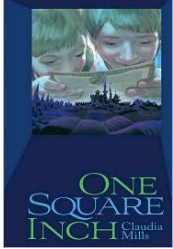
Pun lovers will be overjoyed with Kate McMullan's *School! Adventures at the Harvey N. Trouble Elementary School* (Feiwel & Friends). Each day of the school week brings more trials and tribulation to Ron Faster and his classmates, including Sid Down, Adam Up, Izzy Normal, Viola Fuss, and Dewey Haveto. Unfortunately for Ron and the other passengers, his bus driver, Mr. Stuckinaditch lives up to his name no matter how hard he tries to get the students to school on time. Further chaos ensues with a series of substitutes for Mrs. Petzgalore, who has to stay home to tend to one sick animal after another. The students detest the monotonous menu that always features beanie weenies, but the lunch break is only part of the general uproar that prevails. The subplot of Ron's parents' job search ties into the main action and hints at future improvement. Hugo Faster, retired race car driver, and Cookie Faster, creative chef, seem destined to help resolve at least some of the problems. The text is accompanied by a series of small cartoons that add to the air of absurdity. The punny names of all the characters will be even more funny read aloud, although it is hard to imagine how someone could sustain the tempo. No matter how crazy a real-life school day gets, it will be impossible to surpass the zany happenings in this book aimed at upper elementary and middle school readers. – KP



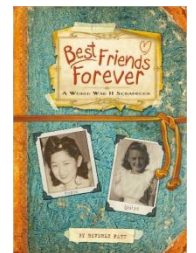
Even those who are slightly claustrophobic will steel themselves to follow the underground drama of *Squeeze* by Rachel Dunstan Miller (Orca). Narrated by 15-year-old Byron, the action begins during a caving expedition with his older brother Jesse and their Dad, an expert caver who has taken his sons exploring for many years. However, Dad also emphasizes the dangers and need for safety precautions. This foreshadowing alerts readers to the problems that are sure to develop when Dad is unable to accompany his two sons, plus Jesse's girlfriend Michelle and roommate Cole, several months later. Goaded by Cole, Jesse agrees to let the group enter an unexplored cave. Michelle suspects Cole is not trustworthy, and various clues alert readers to that possibility as well. His unexplained sources of money to buy fancy gear, his association with people who may deal drugs, and his fierce refusal to let anyone touch his backpack arouse suspicion. Mistakes in judgment cause Byron to lose his own backpack with vital equipment. After the group discovers and confronts Cole with his secret theft of university records, he abandons them, even though Jesse is injured. Byron's journey through uncharted passages to find an alternate exit so he can summon help is harrowing. Of course, we know he will survive, since he is the narrator, but will he be too late to save Jesse and Michelle? Even reluctant readers in junior high and high school will keep turning the pages of this adventure set on Vancouver Island.-KP



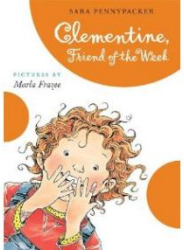
11-year-old Cooper's family, made up of himself, his mother, and his 7-year-old sister Carly, is "just right," – not as chaotic as his friend Spencer's family, and not as perfect as his friend Ben's. That is, until the summer his mother begins sleeping all the time. When their grandfather, Grand-Dan, gives them the deeds to eight square inches of the Yukon, Cooper and Carly create a magical world they call Inchland in *One Square Inch* (Farrar Straus Giroux). After the school year starts, his mother stops sleeping so much, and Cooper is relieved. Then the erratic behavior begins. Cooper's mother flits from one project to another, never finishing anything. She talks too loudly, organizes the cupboards at 3:00am, no longer cleans the house, and leaves Carly home alone. Cooper is embarrassed by her behavior and too ashamed to ask for help. He and Carly spend more and more time in the sanctuary of imaginary Inchland. After his mother fails to finish a project for Carly's school play, Carly's crushing disappointment leads her to run away to Inchland. She is quickly found, but Cooper realizes he can't fix his family by himself and finally reaches out for help. Author Claudia Mills sensitively addresses the reality of living with a parent with mental illness. Cooper's experiences adjusting to middle school, receiving the attention of a girl, and wanting to simultaneously grow up and remain a kid, will resonate with the 10- to 14-year-old target age group.-JC



Beverly Patt uses a scrapbook format to add visual interest to her fictional account of two friends who vow to remain *Best Friends Forever* (Marshall Cavendish), despite their separation during World War II. Louise Krueger is appalled when her best friend Dottie Masuoka and her family are sent from their home in Bainbridge, Washington, to Camp Harmony in 1942. The relocation camp houses dozens of Japanese Americans because of the government's fear that they might sympathize with Japan. Dottie is unable to finish eighth grade with Louise, and her letters from camp paint a bleak picture of the living conditions. She is particularly worried about her grandfather, whose personality has changed entirely as he sinks into depression. Louise remains steadfast in her support of Dottie, despite taunts of "Jap lover" from some classmates. She cares for Dottie's puppy and even manages to visit the camp with her father, a journalist who gets permission to write a story about the situation, although he is denied entrance when he gets there. Still, the Kruegers are able to visit with the Masuokas through the fence. Anti-Japanese sentiment grows, as more US troops die. Louise realizes the complexity of feelings as she visits a hospital to write letters for wounded servicemen, who have seen the horrors of war with the Japanese first hand. Ticket stubs, photos, drawings, seed packets, and other items are "taped" into the scrapbook. The number of items decreases dramatically when the girls lose touch with one another because of a mail tampering scheme, and the question of their future relationship remains unresolved since the scrapbook entries end in 1943. An author's note provides more historical detail about internment camps, but she manages to provide a lot of context in the short novel itself. The book could serve as a good supplement to classes studying the era, particularly the treatment of Japanese Americans.-KP



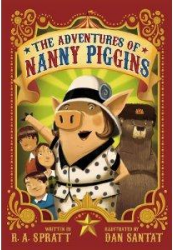
Sara Pennypacker's latest entry in her popular series takes a look at the difficulties Clementine encounters when she is chosen to be the "Friend of the Week" in her third grade class. Sharing her autobiography, collecting milk money, and leading the line will be great. Best of all, she'll receive a booklet in which her classmates share what they like about her. She hatches all sorts of plans to make sure that they will have lots of good things to write. Clementine worries because she doesn't have trophies, certificates, and prizes like fourth grader Margaret, who lives in the same apartment building where Clementine's father is the caretaker. When Clementine's cat, Moisturizer, disappears, all her attention shifts to finding the wayward feline. Thanks to unexpected help from all her friends, including some she didn't even know she had, Clementine finds Moisturizer and realizes that friendship isn't something you can buy. Marlee Frazee's drawings appear intermittently in the text that will encourage newly independent readers to tackle a fairly long book. Those who know Clementine from her earlier adventures will be particularly happy with her return although it's not necessary to have read earlier books to enjoy *Clementine, Friend of the Week* (Hyperion).—KP



Anne Schraff combines mystery with romance in *The Quality of Mercy* (Saddleback). Sixteen-year-old Alonee realizes that her feelings for Jaris will never be returned while he loves someone else. When a new student, Oliver, arrives at Harriet Tubman High, Alonee doesn't feel attracted to him initially but soon discovers his unusual attributes. At first he draws unwitting attention from other students when they find out his father, an astronomy professor, is 70. Not only that, but his parents live apart most of the year so his mother can pursue her career as an opera singer, an unusual occupation for a black woman. However, what really sets Oliver apart is his desire to help Eric, a lower income student who is having trouble in Mr. Buckingham's science class. Although Mr. Buckingham is an intelligent man and brilliant teacher, he never shows mercy to students who fail. He also doesn't show mercy to his neighbors who don't live up to his environmental standards. When Mr. Buckingham starts receiving threats, and acts of vandalism against his property escalate, suspicion falls on Eric. Only Oliver is willing to give him a chance. Oliver and Alonee grow closer as they work to uncover the truth about the attacks on Mr. Buckingham. Although Oliver may seem almost too good to be true at times and a lot more mature than his peers, the mystery relating to Mr. Buckingham will keep readers turning the pages.-KP



R.A. Spratt's humor will appeal to adults who choose to read her book aloud as well as the children who listen to *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins* (Little Brown). Although nannies have appeared in children's books before, there has never been one quite like Nanny Piggins. A retired circus pig, Nanny has no idea what the job entails, but Mr. Green, a corporate lawyer, hires her because her wage request is the ridiculously low sum of ten cents an hour. Relieved that he can now spend most of his time at the office billing clients, Mr. Green leaves his three children, Derrick, Samantha, and Michael, in her care. Nanny adores chocolate and food made from chocolate for all meals plus numerous snacks. She loves watching television and coming up with plans to have fun. She deplores rules such as mandatory school attendance. When her adopted brother, a dancing bear, leaves the circus and joins the household, the adventures multiply. Nanny spends money for school uniforms on an outing to the amusement park, outwits a human nanny vying for her post, and almost succumbs to her inability to stop eating the delicious pies she bakes. These preposterous situations create plenty of laughs. No one can possibly predict how Nanny will manage to get herself and the children out of one scrape after another. Spratt provides some hints for a sequel, notably a tiny bit of doubt about Mrs. Green's alleged demise and the temporary departure of the children's overbearing aunt. Middle-grade readers will hope that Nanny Piggins returns soon for more encounters of the absurd.—KP



16-year-old Loa has a difficult life. She's bright, overweight and socially awkward. She lives in the country and spends too much time riding the bus to and from high school. Her younger sister, Asta, has a genetic condition that requires constant care and is ultimately fatal, leaving the family reeling. Loa's best friend moves to Europe, her oldest friend dies after being hit by a truck and her father loses his job. This series of disasters may seem over-the-top, but told through Loa's hurt, sarcastic and often funny voice in *The Freak Observer* (Lerner), they ring true. No one can blame Loa for her cynicism, but it's the love of family, the effort of a few dedicated teachers and the attention of friends old and new that help her cope with her grief (including her PTSD-induced nightmares) and find hope for the future. Especially refreshing is author Blythe Woolston's respectful presentation of rural life. Hunting, chopping wood and gathering eggs are described matter-of-factly. Loa and her family are complex, authentic and defy stereotype. This is a book for older adolescents, and the physics problems that open each chapter provide a setting for the chapter that both respects and challenges the reader's intellect.—JC



Book Reviews written by:

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

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Books Reviewed in this issue:

Banscherus, J. *Stage Fright*. Capstone, 2011. ISBN 9781434221292. \$17.99.

David, Keren. *When I Was Joe*. Frances Lincoln, 2010. ISBN 9781847801319. \$16.95.

DiCamillo, Kate and Alison McGhee. *Bink & Gollie*. Candlewick, 2010. ISBN 9780763632663. \$15.99.

Hole, Stian. *Garmann's Street*. Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN 9780802853578.

Jonell, Lynne. *Hamster Magic*. Random House, 2010. ISBN 9780375866609. \$12.99.

McBride, Kristina. *The Tension of Opposites*. Egmont, 2010. ISBN 9781606840856. \$16.99.

McMullan, Kate. *School! Adventures at the Harvey N. Trouble Elementary School*. Feiwel and Friends, 2010. ISBN 9780312375928. \$12.99.

Mills, Claudia. *One Square Inch*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2010. ISBN 9780734356521. \$16.99.

Muller, Rachel Dunstan. *Squeeze*. Orca, 2010. ISBN 9781554693245. \$9.95.

Patt, Beverly. *Best Friends Forever: A World War II Scrapbook*. Marshall Cavendish, 2010. ISBN 9780761455776. \$17.99.

Pennypacker, Sara. *Clementine, Friend of the Week*. Hyperion, 2010. ISBN 9781423113553. \$14.99

Schraff, Anne. *The Quality of Mercy*. Saddleback, 2011. ISBN 978161650060. \$8.95.

Spratt, R.A. *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins*. Little Brown, 2010. ISBN 9780316068192. \$15.99.

Woolston, Blythe. *The Freak Observer*. Lerner, 2010. ISBN 9780761362128. \$16.95.