

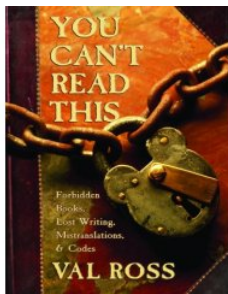
BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

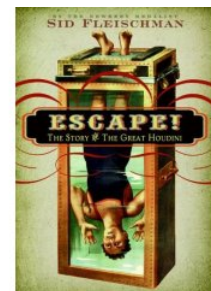
October 2006

The titles reviewed in this month's issue of *Book Notes* are some of the nonfiction works published in 2006 that will be discussed and displayed at a workshop later this month as part of the annual Minnesota Educational Media Organization's annual conference. As soon as the list is finalized, there will be a link from this issue to the MEMO list. However, we're still unpacking boxes so some decisions won't be made until the last minute.

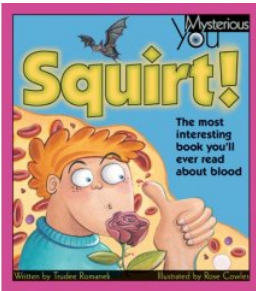


Any discussion about books should be based on the recognition of the power of the written word and the ability to read and interpret those words. *You Can't Read This* by Val Ross (Tundra) includes fascinating true stories about books and languages found and lost through the centuries. Although most people in Western society have heard of Gutenberg's development of printing with movable type, few of us are probably aware of similar advances in Korea at the same time. Development of alphabets, problems of deciphering codes and forgotten languages, destruction of libraries and other repositories of written records, censorship and suppression of literacy are some of the fascinating topics Ross explores. Each chapter could serve as a discussion starter about issues related to literacy, politics, and culture.

Sid Fleischman's biography, *Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini*, reveals the life of a man who used words and images to create a celebrity profile that sometimes strayed from the facts of his past (HarperCollins). Fleischman, a magician himself, insists that many other people could perform the stunts that Houdini developed to astound crowds. (He never gives away any secrets, though.) Born Ehrich Weiss, in Budapest, Houdini later claimed Appleton, Wisconsin, as his birthplace and based his name on that of a famous French magician, Robert-Houdin. During his rise from vaudeville performer to international star, Houdini constantly needed to out-perform imitators and unmask imposters while coming up with increasingly dangerous feats of escape. Numerous photographs, including some that Fleischman received from Houdini's widow, complement the text.



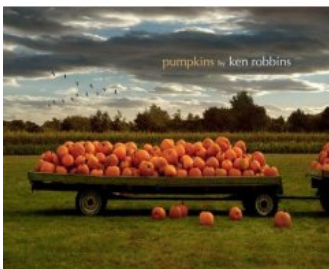
Cartoon images by Rose Cowles illustrate Trudee Romanek’s introduction to the circulatory system in *Squirt! The Most Interesting Book You’ll Ever Read about Blood* (Kids Can). The book covers a wide range of topics, including blood types, heart surgery, the lymph system, and technological developments such as artificial blood. Using the same fact-filled, attention-grabbing approach as in other books in the “Mysterious You” series, Romanek incorporates simple experiments that students can try to illustrate the points made in the text. Brightly colored page backgrounds and imaginative, humorous pictures also involve readers in the subject.



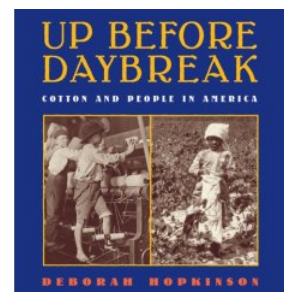
Younger readers and listeners who are fascinated with construction equipment will relish identifying the equipment in *The Construction Alphabet Book* by Jerry Pallotta (Charlesbridge). Rob Bolster’s illustrations transport us to various worksites. Pallotta’s conversational style introduces us to the work done by each machine. He effectively employs plenty of descriptive sounds to remind us of the noisy atmosphere. Young girls may be disappointed that there don’t appear to be any women on the construction crews. Perhaps they are inside the cabs of the machines viewed from a distance. When Pallotta and Bolster start the alphabet again and encourage readers to “finish the rest of the second alphabet,” readers may take up the challenge with some females at the wheels.



The cart on the cover of Ken Robbins’ *Pumpkins* is definitely smaller and more low-key than the huge machines on construction sites (Roaring Brook). The atmospheric photos of fields, autumn leaves, cornstalks, and mounds of pumpkins could come straight from Minnesota travel brochures. Then Robbins backtracks to spring, when the seeds were planted, through the summer growing season, to harvest. The close-up photos provide the next-best-thing to visiting a farm in person. Some of the pumpkins end up as jack-o-lanterns that light the way for trick-or-treaters. Those left in the field die and rot, spilling seeds for next year’s crop.

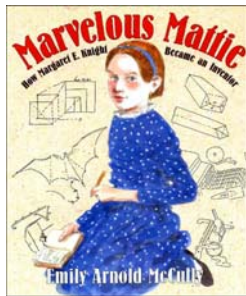


Deborah Hopkinson offers a more in-depth look at an essential crop and the role it played in U.S. history in *Up Before Daybreak: Cotton and People in America* (Scholastic). She traces its growing importance in the American South during the 18th and 19th centuries as England’s industrial revolution in cloth production created a huge demand for cotton exports. Plantation slaves worked long hours under harsh conditions to raise and process the cotton shipped to textile mills. Eventually, factories were built in the North, in places such as Lowell, Massachusetts. After the Civil War, sharecropping replaced plantations, and entire families continued to work in the fields to survive.



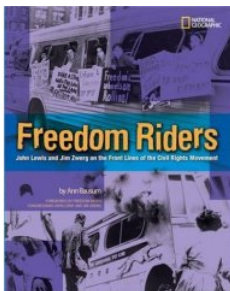
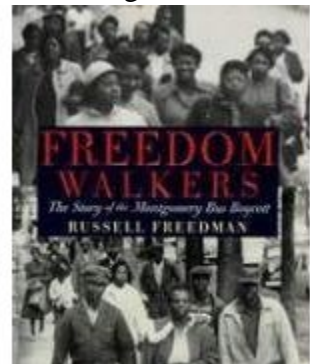
Immigrants arrived in Lowell, and new mills were opened in the South. Hopkinson incorporates sections of oral histories and interviews to personalize some of the accounts, although she carefully notes the limitations of such sources in her introduction to the volume. Numerous black and white photographs let readers see the people behind the events and the difficult conditions under which they worked and lived.

Margaret E. Knight, went to work in the textile mills in Manchester, New Hampshire, when she was 12. After witnessing an accident that killed another girl, she devised a metal guard to block the shuttles from flying off the loom. In fact, Mattie tinkered with machines all her life as Emily Arnold McCully shows in her biography for young readers: *Marvelous Mattie: How Margaret E. Knight Became an Inventor* (Farrar Straus Giroux)



Born in 1838, Knight struggled her entire life to convince people that a woman could be an inventor. Although Knight is credited with 90 inventions and received 22 patents in her lifetime, McCully concentrates on her production of a machine to make paper bags with flat bottoms. After a man stole her idea, she had to defend her case in court. Her victory led to the creation of the Eastern Paper Bag Company, a business she set up with a partner. McCully's illustrations include full-color renditions of the events of Knight's life and black-and-white sketches of some of the inventions.

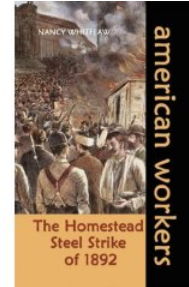
Two books about more recent history document the struggles for recognition and civil rights that took place in Alabama and other southern states. Although several children's books have documented the life of Rosa Parks and her refusal to give up her seat on the bus, Russell Freedman puts her action in a larger context in *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Holiday House). He profiles a number of men and women who led the efforts to secure better treatment for blacks who rode the buses. However, what is as striking as the work of those leaders is the tenacity of hundreds of ordinary citizens who came up with alternate transportation or walked miles to avoid riding the buses for over a year. Eventually the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's bus segregation laws were unconstitutional, but desegregation on the buses led to violent responses in the short term. Freedman provides short updates on what happened to some of the individuals he profiled earlier in the volume and sets the Montgomery boycott in the larger civil rights movement. Numerous black and white photos accompany his text, and an annotated bibliography offers guidance for those seeking additional information.



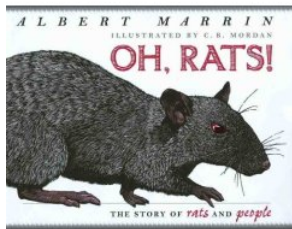
Ann Bausum focuses on a violent chapter in the struggle for civil rights in *Freedom Riders* (National Geographic). She profiles two college students, Jim Zwerg and John Lewis, who took part in the Freedom Rides in the summer of 1961. Jim Zwerg, who was white, grew up in Wisconsin, where there were almost no African Americans. John R. Lewis, born on a sharecropper's farm in Alabama, grew up in a segregated society, where he had to use water fountains, rest rooms, and other facilities designated for "colored" people. He left for Nashville,

Tennessee when he was 16. There his path crossed with Zwerg's. Their families opposed their involvement in civil rights protests that could lead to their arrest or violent confrontations. When a mob attacked the Freedom Riders in Montgomery, both men were injured. Zwerg's statement from the hospital, where he lay battered and bruised, encouraged others to join the movement. Lewis led a press conference with Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders. Bausum summarizes the lives of the two men since then and provides brief introductions to several other participants, many of whom were arrested or injured. The layout, incorporating photos, quotations, and explanations of events, adds to the book's drama.

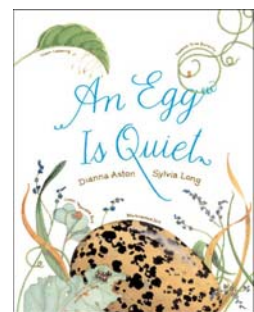
Nancy Whitelaw's account of *The Homestead Steel Strike of 1892* chronicles a violent clash between steel workers and Pinkerton guards (Morgan Reynolds). Whitelaw profiles Andrew Carnegie and Henry C. Frick and their rise to power and wealth before they acquired Homestead Steel. She also describes the formation of the American Federation of Labor and the divisions within the ranks of workers. Carnegie left for England before negotiations were complete, leaving Frick to deal with workers. The inexorable move toward violent confrontation makes for compelling reading in this book for secondary school students.



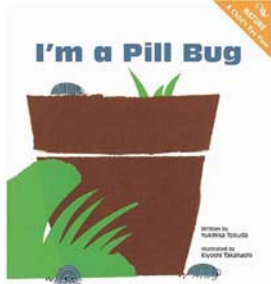
Albert Marrin merges history and science in *Oh, Rats! The Story of Rats and People* (Penguin). He explains how rats have survived and thrived through centuries. In recent history they have often benefited by living near humans, who provide living conditions ideal for rat survival. Our garbage offers fine dining for rats, but Marrin notes that in many cultures, rats are eaten by humans. Other topics include attempts to eliminate rats and the threats to humans from rat-borne diseases. Yet, he also acknowledges rats' intelligence and acknowledges that rats can make great pets and even assist people in tasks such as locating land mines. Not only does Marrin provide suggestions for other nonfiction books about rats, but he also includes a selection of fictional works about the creatures, including such classics as *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*.



Dianne Aston takes a more wide-ranging view of animal life in *An Egg Is Quiet* (Chronicle). Thanks to Sylvia Long's remarkable illustrations, viewers know that an egg is also colorful, artistic, and shapely. Together words and pictures reveal the incredible variety of sizes, textures, and hues of eggs produced by reptiles, insects, birds, and other creatures. Diagrams of chicken, salmon, and grasshopper development within their eggs make clear the importance of that environment. The wide variety of eggs on the initial double-page spread and the adult animals that came from them on the final two pages will fascinate viewers who can take the time to find the counterparts.

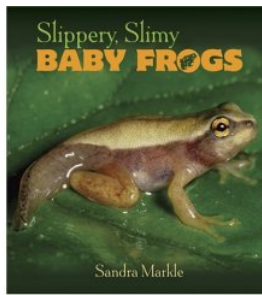
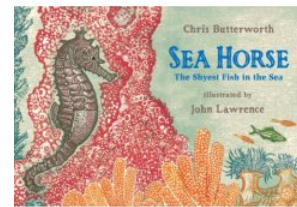


Often the animals featured in books live in exotic places or have unusual characteristics.



Yukihisa Tokuda concentrates on a small, familiar creature in *I'm a Pill Bug* (Kane/Miller). Although I don't usually like animals "narrators," the simple, direct address to very young readers works in this case. The pill bug encourages readers to look closely to find them outdoors. The bug explains why they live near people, what they eat, how they defend themselves, how they reproduce, and what predators they avoid. Kiyoshi Takahashi's cut paper illustrations also have a childlike quality. The book tells readers how to take care of pill bugs for a short time to study them but reminds them to release the tiny creatures before winter.

Chris Butterworth looks at another small, but rarely seen animal in *Sea Horse: The Shyest Fish in the Sea*, another book for elementary school students (Candlewick). His overview of their life cycle includes the unusual way in which they reproduce. Although the female produces eggs, the male has the pouch in which they grow. He gives birth to 200-300 babies at a time. The small sea horses live independently from the start, needing to find food and escape danger to live to adulthood. John Lawrence's illustrations made from "vinyl engravings, watercolor washes, and printed wood textures" transport us to the underwater world.



Stunning photographs reveal some of the fascinating aspects of amphibian development in *Slippery, Slimy Baby Frogs* by Sandra Markle (Walker). Markle describes the contacts she made with wildlife photographers who captured the images of the developing frogs. Astonishing close-up views such as eggs developing on the back of a Pygmy Marsupial Frog or Hip Pocket Frog tadpoles climbing into the pouch on their father's leg offer intriguing glimpses into the variety of ways frogs reproduce and survive. A world map at the end indicates the locations where the various frogs were photographed.

Sometimes authors make up animals to include in their books, especially if they are writing poetry. Julie Larios presents *Yellow Elephant: A Bright Bestiary* with illustrations by Julie Paschkis (Harcourt). Each short poem is centered in a page with a small illustration on the left and a facing full-page portrait of the same animal. Each animal portrait is tied to a color, which is usually repeated several times in the poem. Many of the poems are unrhymed, but the rhythm and word play create a verbal portrait that works well with the visual representation.



Although several books of concrete poems have appeared in recent years, Joyce Sidman develops the concept through an entire picture book for young readers. *Meow Ruff*, illustrated by Michelle Berg, follows the rivalry and ultimate friendship of a kitten and puppy (Houghton Mifflin). Gathering clouds darken in the sky while puppy and cat prepare for a fight. Seeking shelter under

a picnic table once the rain starts, the two animals put aside their differences. The words of the poem are incorporated in every part of the illustrations from grass to trees to clouds. In fact, the book requires repeated readings to follow the various lines of the story although the basic plot can be shared even with pre-readers.

Visual acuity and creative connections are also fostered in *Unlikely Pairs: Fun with Famous Works of Art* by Bob Raczka (Millbrook). Rather than considering individual paintings or sculpture, Raczka juxtaposes works from various eras and styles on facing pages and encourages viewers to make up their own connections. For example, Auguste Rodin's sculpture of "The Thinker" seems to contemplate the "Large Chess Board" painted by Paul Klee. Raczka offers a couple sentences about each artist and his work at the end of the book. However, this volume will serve more as an impetus to creative thinking and writing than as a systematic introduction to art history.



Another visual challenge combines art and math in *A Million Dots* by Andrew Clements (Simon & Schuster). Yes, there are a million dots in the book, and Clements tallies them through the pages. On each page, he highlights one or more facts related to the number reached in that section of the book. Mike Reed provides related illustrations and circles the corresponding dots, some of which are easier to spot than others, depending on the background colors. While Clements cautions against counting all the dots (allotting one second for each would require more than eleven days of study!), he definitely piques reader interest about a variety of facts involving numbers large and small.



If you want to satisfy your curiosity about what's new in publishing for children and young adults, stop by the CCYAB, where hundreds of new books arrive every month.

Reviewer: Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

Books reviewed in this issue:

Ross, Val. *You Can't Read This*. Tundra, 2006. ISBN 0-88776-732-x. \$19.95.

Fleischman, Sid. *Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini*. HarperCollins, 2006. ISBN 0-06-087094-9. \$18.99.

Romanek, Trudee. *Squirt! The Most Interesting Book You'll Ever Read About Blood*. Illus. by Rose Cowles. Kids Can, 2006. ISBN 1-55337-776-1. \$14.95.

Pallotta, Jerry. *The Construction Alphabet Book*. Illus. by Rob Bolster. Charlesbridge, 2006. ISBN 1-57091-437-0. \$16.95.

Robbins, Ken. *Pumpkins*. Roaring Brook, 2006. ISBN 1-59643-184-9. \$14.95.

Hopkinson, Deborah. *Up Before Daybreak: Cotton and People in America*. Scholastic, 2006. ISBN 0-439-63901-8. \$18.99.

McCully, Emily Arnold. *Marvelous Mattie: How Margaret E. Knight Became an Inventor*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006. ISBN 0-374-34810-3. \$16.

Freedman, Russell. *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. Holiday House, 2006. ISBN 0-8234-2031-0. \$18.95.

Bausum, Ann. *Freedom Riders*. National Geographic, 2006. ISBN 0-7922-4173-8. \$18.95

Whitelaw, Nancy. *The Homestead Steel Strike of 1892*. Morgan Reynolds., 2006. ISBN 1-931798-88-5. \$27.95.

Marrin, Albert. *Oh, Rats! The Story of Rats and People* Illus. by C. B. Mordan. Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0-525-47762-4. \$16.99

Aston, Dianna. *An Egg is Quiet*. Illus. by Sylvia Long. Chronicle, 2006. ISBN 0-8118-4428-5. \$16.95.

Tokuda, Yukihiisa. *I'm a Pill Bug*. Illus. by Kiyoshi Takahashi. Kane/Miller, 2006. ISBN 1-929132-95-6. \$7.95 (paperback)

Butterworth, Chris. *Sea Horse: The Shyest Fish in the Sea*. Illus. by John Lawrence. Candlewick, 2006. ISBN 076362989-8. \$16.99.

Markle, Sandra. *Slippery, Slimy Baby Frogs*. Walker, 2006. ISBN 0-8026-80620-8. \$16.95.

Larios, Julie. *Yellow Elephant: a Bright Bestiary*. Illus. by Julie Paschkis. Harcourt, 2006. ISBN 0-15-205442-7. \$16.

Sidman, Joyce. *Meow Ruff* Illus. by Michelle Berg. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. ISBN 0-618-44894-2. \$16.

Raczka, Bob. *Unlikely Pairs: Fun with Famous Works of Art*. Millbrook, 2006. ISBN 0-7613-2936-6. \$23.93.

Clements, Andrew. *A Million Dots*. Illus. by Mike Reed. Simon & Schuster, 2006. ISBN 0-689-85824-8. \$16.95.