

Select and evaluate literature to educate children and teachers
 S. E. L. E. C. T.

About S.E.L.E.C.T. Books at Salem State University

The S.E.L.E.C.T. Nook Newsletter shares information about new children’s books with teachers and Salem State University faculty. The S.E.L.E.C.T. Nook Newsletter was founded by Dr. Jo Ann Brewer and the late Dr. Diane Bushner and is made possible through the generosity of the following publishers:

- Abrams
- Alfred K. Knopf
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Book Reviews

Book reviews are written by undergraduate and graduate students studying children’s literature in courses at Salem State University. The book reviews printed here are excerpted from longer papers.

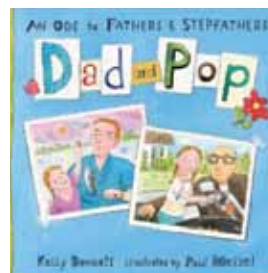


Book Reviewers: Spring 2011 Edition

The book reviews printed in this edition of the newsletter were written by undergraduate students enrolled in EDU/ENG 334: Literature for Children in the Elementary Grades, graduate students in EDU 758: Using Literature across the Curriculum, Francesca Pomerantz, editor, and Nina Miller, assistant editor.

Dad and Pop: An Ode to Fathers and Stepfathers

Author: Kelly Bennett
 Illustrator: Paul Meisel
 Candlewick Press 2010



Dad and Pop by Kelly Bennett is based on her children’s situation with their two fathers. In this book, a young girl describes her life having a biological father and a step-father. As she says to begin the book, “I have two dads. I call this one Dad and this one Pop.” Throughout the story, she explains the differences between her biological father and her stepfather.

She shares with us the special things she does with each father. For example, “Dad and I play sports. Pop and I play games.” After she describes the opposites, she begins to share the similarities; how both fathers teach her how to cook and paint, and how they are both into bikes.

The illustrations in this book were done by Paul Meisel and they truly caught my eye. He uses watercolors, pastels, and acrylic, and overall the colors are very bright. I really liked the picture that went along with the text, “Pop and I swap stories.” In this picture, Meisel uses darker colors and a darker tone to illustrate telling stories at night in a campsite setting. The young girl is holding a flashlight under her chin and Meisel does an excellent job shadowing her face in and out of the light. Meisel also makes very clearly distinguishable facial expressions on each person throughout the book. When the young

girl talks about sharing jokes with Dad, you can see the laughter by looking at him, his body movement and his facial expression are characteristics of a person laughing.

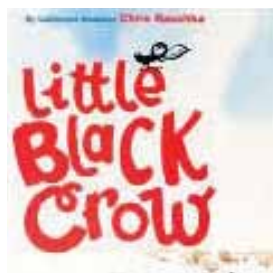
I enjoyed reading this book because I know so many children with a biological parent and a step-parent. This book can be used in grades ranging from preschool to second grade. It would be a great read aloud and it can be used to start a discussion regarding different family lives and different types of families. It can help children cope with a change that has taken place due to the separation of parents. This book is not only a good book to read aloud in a classroom. A stepfather could read this book with the child and together, they can learn how to deal with acceptance and how it is okay to become close to someone new.

—Jennifer O'Connell

Little Black Crow

Author and Illustrator: Chris Raschka

Atheneum Books for Young Readers 2010



Former Caldecott medalist Chris Raschka invites young readers on a wondrous journey with his new book titled *Little Black Crow*. Filled with simple fluid language, the book demonstrates the beauty and rhythm of words. In the story a boy quietly sits and studies a nearby crow. The reader, almost as if eavesdropping, is privy to all of the questions the boy ponders while watching

this common little creature. "Little black crow do you ever complain in the wind and the rain? Do you ever complain?" Delving deeply, the boy goes on to ask many thought-provoking questions. Finally, he contemplates the possibility that perhaps he isn't the only curious soul and asks, "Little black crow, might you ever wonder about someone like me?" *Little Black Crow* successfully and simply portrays the sheer splendor of a wondering child.

Raschka illustrates using various watercolors in muted tones juxtaposed against thick, black images of the boy and crow. The bold images immediately grab the reader's attention. *Little Black Crow* would be a solid choice for elementary students, grades Pre-K through 3. Teachers might consider using it for an inquiry-based science lesson focusing children's attention to the power of observation and questioning. The fluidity of the book's language and poetic rhythm might also be well matched for a poetry study.

—Nina Miller

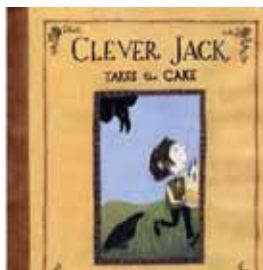
Clever Jack Takes the Cake

Author: Candace Fleming

Illustrator: G. Brian Karas

Random House Children's Books 2010

Sometimes one must roll with the punches and make lemonade when life gives you lemons. This is exactly what clever Jack does when he receives an unexpected invitation to the Princess's tenth birthday party in Candace Fleming's book *Clever Jack Takes the Cake*. Young Jack is riddled with excitement when invited to take part in the royal birthday festivities. However, his mother promptly reminds him that he has no acceptable present to bring and no money with



which to buy one. Always the optimist, hearing this doesn't stop Jack. Trading all of his worldly possessions for some sugar, flour and eggs, resourceful Jack makes a decadent birthday cake for the princess.

Proud of his sweet gift, Jack begins his journey to the castle. On his way, he is met with much unexpected opposition...

Four and 20 blackbirds, a giant troll, a dark forest, a gypsy and her dancing bear, and a cautious guard, all of whom take their own share of the cake. When at last Jack reaches the princess, he kneels before her empty handed. Yet, somehow clever Jack manages to present the Princess with the very best gift of all. You'll have to read for yourself to find out why Jack becomes a guest of honor at the princess's party.

Written much like a whimsical fairytale, *Clever Jack Takes the Cake* combines all of the adventurous elements needed for a good story... an endearing main character, trouble around every corner, and a happy ending. This is a tale that can be enjoyed over and over again. Recommended for boys and girls alike, in kindergarten through third grade, this is a perfect book for a read-aloud. The book provides ample opportunities to discuss themes and concepts, such as fairytales, personal determination, flexibility and the value of sharing one's experiences.

The author's writing includes both carefully chosen vocabulary, as well as descriptive language. The reader will encounter rich words such as succulent, sputtered, threadbare, and bloom-speckled. *Clever Jack Takes the Cake* also offers young readers and budding writers the chance to read and discuss what, indeed, makes a story intriguing as they further examine the elements of plot, character and dialogue.

The illustrator, G. Brian Karas depicts the story with child-like whimsy using gouache watercolors and pencil. Creating mainly in muted colors, Karas mixes it up with pops of eye-catching red throughout. Similar in style to Will Hillenbrand, Karas lends strong support to the text by including an array of both intimate and full page illustrations. His artwork is simple in nature yet effectively hones in on the emotions of the storybook characters. The fine pairing of Fleming's writing with Karas' illustrations is the perfect recipe for story success. *Clever Jack Takes the Cake* is an absolute sweet treat!

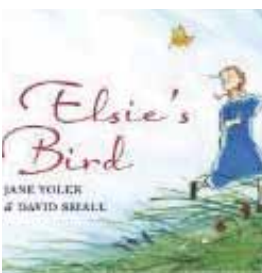
—Nina Miller

Elsie's Bird

Author: Jane Yolen

Illustrator: David Small

Penguin Young Readers Group 2010



Change can be hard. Jane Yolen, the renowned author of many award-winning books, has written another quality book called *Elsie's Bird*, about a 19th century eight year-old girl who undergoes many changes in her young life. Elsie moves out west to Nebraska following the death of her mother. Moving to this faraway place means having to saying goodbye to her

Boston home and the sounds of the city that she loves. Once she arrives in Nebraska Elsie is unable to hear the sounds of her new home on the prairie until one day she chases Timmy, her beloved

canary, deep into the prairie. Finally, the prairie, with all its sounds, becomes a home.

The illustrator David Small successfully conveys the character's feelings through the illustrations in the story. Pictures of her happy days in Boston show crowded streets and buildings and the busy life she loves. The pictures of the prairie show a wide-open area with high grass that gives the reader a feeling of loneliness. These scenes mirror Elsie's feelings. The illustrations are colorful and inviting. On many pages the story is well told by the illustrations alone.

This book can be used with various grade levels or with young children at home. Younger children can relate to Elsie's feelings during times in their own lives when they felt the way she did; sad, glad, comfortable. The relationship between the character and her pet can be explored. Teachers can use this book with older students prior to writing to model how to utilize the senses in their writing. It can also be used in social studies to compare two different types of environments.

This is an enjoyable story that can be appreciated by children of all ages. Most children, regardless of age, can relate to Elsie's feelings. Jane Yolen has created another story that is sure to be loved by many readers.

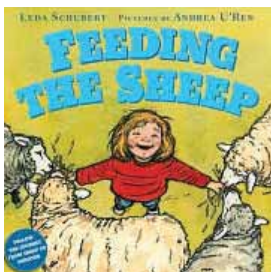
—Nancy Corthell

Feeding the Sheep

Author: Leda Schubert

Illustrator: Andrea U'Ren

Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2010



Feeding the Sheep, written by Leda Schubert and illustrated by Andrea U'Ren, is a charming picture book which could be considered realistic fiction with some informational facts that helps answer the question, "How is a sweater made?" The story follows a mother and daughter through the steps of making a sweater. The mother shears the wool, washes it, dries

it, cards it into yarn, dyes it, and knits it into a special surprise. The mother and daughter share a special relationship where the daughter emulates her mother and wants to be just like her. It is a great book for mothers and daughters to read together.

The text in the book is simple and informative. It is also repetitive and rhyming, which creates an even flow to the book. At each step the little girl asks, "What are you doing?" and the mother answers with the task she is performing and a little rhyme such as, "Push and pull, brushes full." This style could be used in teaching about rhyme to young readers. The very detailed and colorful illustrations in this book will grab the reader's attention and bring them into the story. Andrea U'Ren's drawings use vivid yet warm and inviting colors that make the setting and the characters more real and interesting to look at. The illustrations seamlessly correspond with the text and enhance what is being said with action. It is possible that this book could be a wordless book and the reader would still understand what was going on. The faces of the characters are expressive; showing joy, excitement, and curiosity.

Leda Schubert is a successful nonfiction picture book writer with almost a dozen books in publication. *Feeding the Sheep* shares the

ideas of bonding and working hard with another one of Schubert's books, *Here Comes Darrell*. These books help teach children about the importance of hard work and its rewards.

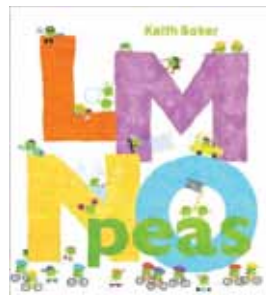
Feeding the Sheep is a book that can be enjoyed by both children and adults. It will teach and entertain the very young, and even get them to look at their clothing and ask more questions about how things are made. In addition to learning the process of making clothing, this book can be used to teach rhythm and rhyme, the importance of hard work and its rewards, and start a discussion about how things are made. I would recommend this book for Pre-K through first grade and plan on adding it to my personal library.

—Jenna Conley

LMNO Peas

Author and Illustrator: Keith Baker

Simon and Schuster 2010



LMNO Peas is not just an alphabet book. Keith Baker approaches each letter with creativity and provides a sense of wonder as the alphabet peas stroll through the ABC's. This book defines the phrase "making learning fun." Baker captivates his audience through the use of rhyming words, alliteration, and illustrations and provides a little mystery to accompany his text.

Baker's illustrations are not just beautiful - they serve a purpose, thereby enhancing the story. There is a seamless connection between the text and the illustrations. Each letter is provided with a few labeled occupations beginning with that letter, and an illustration describing what that job may entail. For instance, the letter A stands for "acrobats, artists, and astronauts in space," and each has a concrete illustration of the word. If a child did not understand a word, the illustrations offer a clear definition. This allows the children to activate their prior knowledge and build upon their vocabulary as they read this beautifully written and illustrated story. The use of vibrant colors eludes a happy, positive vibe.

LMNO Peas incorporates many rhyming words. This not only teaches children about rhyming but it also allows the text to flow smoothly, in a sing-song manner that is perfect for young children. Baker also uses alliteration which helps to make the text sound melodious. For example, "We're builders, bathers, and bikers in a race." The text is simple yet fun. The illustrations include the capital letter but the text includes the lower case, introducing the students to both. However, this book isn't just educational, it's also thought provoking. It covers a wide range of occupations, allowing children to see the many possibilities that they can aspire to be. As an added bit of fun and adventure Baker asks the students to be investigators by hiding a ladybug between the two pages for them to find.

The best part about *LMNO Peas* is the last page. On this two-page spread, Baker questions, "Who are you?" By asking this, Baker encourages the children to be creative and thoughtful. The question provides endless opportunities for teaching activities. One activity could be to write a page about "who you are" using rhyming words. This book is perfect for young children just learning the alphabet, children just learning to read, and those who can read. Even at my ripe age, I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

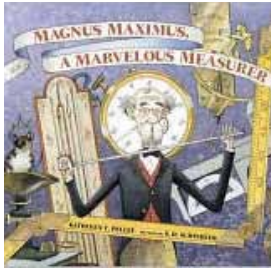
—Jennifer Godett

Magnus Maximus, A Marvelous Measurer

Author: Kathleen T. Pelley

Illustrator: S.D. Schindler

Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2010



Magnus Maximus, a Marvelous Measurer is the tale of an old man who spends his days measuring and counting all manner of things, from freckles on a nose to raisins in a bun. The general consensus among the townspeople is that he truly is a “marvelous measurer.” When an escaped circus lion parades through town, it is Magnus Maximus that comes to

the rescue. “Sit still while I measure you,” he scolds, and the lion can’t help but oblige. As news of this spreads, the townspeople grow to love him even more. “What a marvelous measurer!” they exclaim, making him the go-to man for all the town’s measuring needs. It isn’t until he steps on his glasses and has to get by without them that he realizes maybe there is more to life than measuring things.

The ink and watercolor illustrations have a distinctly Victorian feel that bring the world of this marvelous measurer to life. A hinged ruler crookedly borders the first two pages, implying that the book will ultimately be a measure of Magnus Maximus himself. While he is the main focus, the townspeople offer comic relief that is strengthened by the jaunty illustrations. The centerfold is reserved for the circus lion, and rightly so. The scene is awash with muted yellows, browns, and blues, with a seemingly ferocious lion stalking through the just-deserted street. Elderly dames with mouths agape stare in terror through shop windows, while young boys in shirtsleeves straddle the tops of lampposts. One man disappears beneath a manhole cover as a fruit merchant plucks his wares in disbelief. The sheer terror is immediately dispelled by the bent figure of Magnus Maximus on the following pages as he sets his sights on taming the lion.

Although the eye-catching illustrations are what drew me to this book, I was just as enthralled by the tale of this eclectic old man. The prose is quaint and clever, with alliteration that highlights the quirkiness of the text. Words like “dither” and “periscope” might have students rushing to the nearest dictionary, but it is all in good fun. I would recommend this to readers between the ages of five and nine, although the artistry and theme can be enjoyed universally. The subject matter makes it an obvious target for math enthusiasts, but I would also encourage self-proclaimed “math-haters” to give it a try. It would be interesting to spend the day measuring the “extraordinary things” that Magnus did (with the exception of the circus lion, of course!).

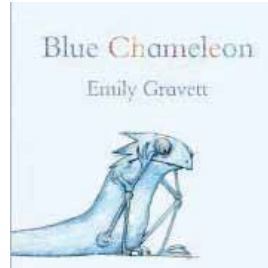
Kathleen T. Pelley’s previous works, *Inventor McGregor* and *The Giant King* are both folkloric and whimsical in nature, with striking watercolor illustrations throughout. S.D. Schindler’s work is as eclectic as her style, spanning from science books (*Honey in a Hive* and *Spinning Spiders*) to the supernatural (*Catwings* and *Skeleton Hiccups*). They achieved harmony in *Magnus Maximus, a Marvelous Measurer*. The quirky text blends seamlessly with uproarious illustrations, making the book a pleasure for children and adults alike.

—Sarah Vuona

Blue Chameleon

Author and Illustrator: Emily Gravett

Simon & Schuster 2010



Blue Chameleon is lonely. On a quest for friends, he introduces himself to a banana and, lo and behold, he turns yellow. A cockatoo, a snail, a boot, a sock, a ball, a fish, and a grasshopper follow and the chameleon changes his colors and patterns accordingly. None of the introductions turn into lasting friendships (for example, the ball doesn’t respond and

the grasshopper hops away) and the chameleon is down in the dumps on a gray rock. He then disappears completely on a white page. Happily, a colorful chameleon comes along and white chameleon bursts into joyful color as he finds a friend.

This is a delightfully simple picture book, perfect for children ages 0-6. There is one illustration and one word per page, along with a humorous dialogue or thought “bubble” for every 2 page spread. For example, when Blue Chameleon meets the brown cowboy boot, he says “howdy” and when he is down and out on the gray rock, he thinks “I give up.” The text and the expressive colored pencil illustrations teach colors, patterns, and some print conventions (dialogue and thought bubbles). Young children will be engaged by the story, the humor, and the illustrations and emergent readers will enjoy reading the simple text.

—Francesca Pomerantz

Peaceful Pieces: Poems and Quilts About Peace

Author and Illustrator: Anna Grossnickle Hines

Henry Holt and Company 2011



In *Peaceful Pieces: Poems and Quilts about Peace*, Anna Grossnickle Hines writes about conflict and peace in all their manifestations. Inner peace; peace in nature; peace between siblings and classmates; peace and anger; war and peace; and famous peacemakers are subjects of the poems in this moving collection.

The poems are strikingly illustrated by Grossnickle Hines’ handmade quilts reproduced in their original size in vibrant color and detail. She explains in an informative afterword about quilting that “times and methods have changed, the looks of the quilts have changed but the sense of community, the storytelling, and sharing the joy of creating something beautiful or useful have not.” *Peaceful Pieces* can enhance the language arts, art, and social studies curriculum with its poetry, storytelling quilts, and the biographical information about celebrated peacemakers described in the poems and the afterword. The book may also inspire young writers to write about peace themselves and to create quilts or another form of art as illustrations. This is poetry and art for all ages.

—Francesca Pomerantz