

December 2012

Of Cabbages and Kings: Welcoming New Reviewers

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Recommended Citation

Van Belle, Leah; Autrey, Lynette; Mulvany, Tara; and Zamborowski, Melanie (2012) "Of Cabbages and Kings: Welcoming New Reviewers," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 44 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol44/iss2/9>

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Of Cabbages and Kings: Welcoming New Reviewers

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEWS

BY LEAH VAN BELLE, LYNETTE AUTREY, TARA MULVANY, & MELANIE ZAMBOROWSKI

This issue of the *Michigan Reading Journal* is filled with the work of first-time contributors to the journal, and first-time-published authors. How fitting then that the children's book reviews column would introduce to readers three new reviewers—Lynette Autrey, Tara Mulvany, and Melanie Zaborowski. It's especially exciting to me to welcome these ladies to the journal as they have worked with me as graduate students in literacy methods courses, an after-school reading clinic, and a research class. I already knew that the three of them were amazing teachers and great writers, so when I found out they also shared my love of children's books, inviting them to join the review column seemed like the perfect avenue for our shared interests and another fun opportunity to collaborate. It also feels like coming full circle for me because when I was completing my master's degree under the mentorship of children's literature guru Dr. Linda Pavonetti, she was the children's book reviews editor for *MRJ* and then the journal editor. Linda invited me to contribute reviews, and I remember the joy of reading wonderful books and actually getting the opportunity to write about them. And, oh, the thrill of seeing my reviews printed for the first time and hoping that they might help teachers and librarians put great books in the hands of readers! I hope Lynette, Tara, and Melanie experience the same excitement—over and over again as they continue to contribute to the journal. Welcome, ladies, and happy reading!—Leah

Crews, N. (2011). *Jack and the beanstalk*. New York: Henry Holt. 32 pp. ISBN978-0-8050-8765-9. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Nina Crews puts a modern twist on a classic tale by giving this story an urban, multicultural setting. This contemporary take on the traditional is one of the things for which she is known, and this book doesn't disappoint. Jack is no country boy, but a young city boy who is rewarded with magic beans for helping a neighbor. Jack's adventures up the beanstalk are laid out in multimedia collages featuring diverse characters, humor, and playful use of font. Crews puts a fun twist on the end: the giant and his wife turn back into regular-sized humans because Jack has broken a spell they were placed under for being greedy. A rewarding ending, but not didactic—thoroughly entertaining.—Leah

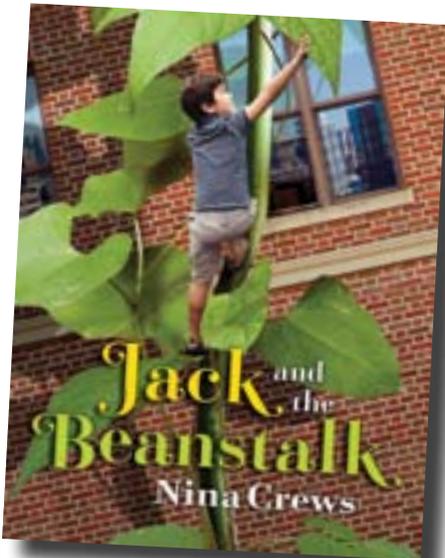
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2011). *Wishes and worries: Coping with a parent who drinks too much alcohol*. (Ill. By L. Rudebjer). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-238-7. (Hardcover); \$17.95.

From the Tundra's *Coping* series for children facing adult issues, *Wishes and Worries* is a quick-read picture book with a heavy message. The book gives relatable examples of a young girl's home life influenced by her father's alcohol abuse and the impact it has on her while at home and at school. Sharing this story will allow for many opportunities to open the doors of communication for children coping with the burden of living with a parent who drinks too much. The vocabulary

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Melanie Zaborowski is an elementary science and reading teacher at Our Lady of Refuge in Orchard Lake and is working on her Master of Arts in Teaching, Literacy Education, at Madonna University in Livonia, MI.



is kid-friendly and so is the lesson: “You didn’t cause this problem...and it’s not your problem to fix” (p. 18). The story concludes in a realistic and hopeful manner without an “all’s-well-that-ends-well” cheesy ending. The many professional contributors to this book also include information and advice for adults who wish to reach out to children coping with parents who drink. Lars Rudebjer, the book’s illustrator, has illustrated a variety of media including over 35 children’s books in many countries all over the world. *Wishes and Worries* can be a great tool to help guide discussion for concerned parents, teachers and counselors.—*Lynette*

Desrosiers, S. (2011). *Hocus Pocus*. (Ill. R. Simard). Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 9781554535774. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

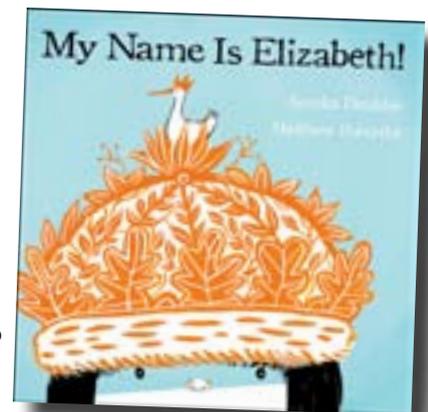
This delightful comic adventure features Hocus Pocus, the naughty rabbit who lives in the magician’s hat and Dog the magician’s cranky canine. A conflict occurs when Hocus Pocus wakes Dog while trying to get a carrot to snack on. From then on it becomes a clash between intelligence and strength. This graphic novel uses pictures to tell the story, with very few words. It serves as a great mentor text to teach young students how illustrations are important to every story. It also could serve as a mentor text to teach students how to make inferences.—*Tara*

Diggs, T. (2011). *Chocolate me!* (Ill. by S.W. Evans). New York: Feiwel and Friends. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-312-60326-7. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Year hear the words “celebrity author” in regards to a children’s book and cringe a little. I know, I know, me, too. But suspend that reaction and read Diggs’ first children’s book; you’ll find it as sweet as a cocoa treat. A young African American boy is pestered with questions by his all-White classmates—Why is his hair so big? Why is his skin so dark? And even teased with what amount to racist slurs—His white teeth stand out so much from his dark skin that his classmates could use him as a flashlight. As he struggles to feel good about himself, it’s his mother’s reassuring love and a batch of chocolate cupcakes to share with his classmates that help him see he is beautiful, dark, and sweet, just like chocolate. A heart-warming look at how young children develop positive self image, and the real treat is that Diggs does this in a way that feels genuine and natural, never forced. A book that will leave readers a little melty inside, just like a warm brownie.—*Leah*

Dunklee, A. (2011). *My name is Elizabeth!* (Ill. by M. Forsythe). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-560-6. (Hardcover); \$14.95.

Not since Kevin Henkes’ *Chrysanthemum* have we had such an endearing tale about a little girl and a very long name. Elizabeth’s loves her nine-letter name: “I like all the neat things my mouth does when I say it.” Not to mention there is even a *queen* with the same name. Lizzy, Beth, Liz—none of them will do. And being called Betsy causes an almost apoplectic reaction, which she is able to calm in herself so that she can quite loudly, quite proudly, and quite firmly proclaim to the whole world, “My NAME is ELIZABETH Alfreda Roxanne Carmelita Bluebell Jones!! / But you may call me Elizabeth.” Luckily her littler brother’s “Wizabef” is considered close enough. Dunklee’s sassy writing and Forsythe’s detailed pen, ink, and gouache illustrations build off one another to create a young heroine who leaves the reader wanting more. Let’s hope the further adventures of Elizabeth are soon to be read!—*Leah*



Emberly, R. & Emberly, E. (2011). *Ten little beasties*. New York: Neal Porter. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59643-627-5. (Hardcover); \$12.99.

A fanciful twist to the traditional counting tune. The wacky little beasties will delight the very young as they count along and explore the visual details—in layers of black and white with electric pops of color. A multigenerational feast for the eyes and ears,

the book represents the collaboration of Ed Emberly; his daughter, Rebecca; and his granddaughter, Adrian, who sings the beasties song available for download. Great fun for little ones!—*Leah*

Freedman, D. (2011). *Blue chicken*. (Ill by D. Freedman). New York: Penguin Young Readers Group. ISBN: 9780670012930. (Hardcover); \$15.99.

Deborah Freedman mixes chickens and real paint together to create a silly story. I absolutely love how Freedman uses minimal text and the color blue to help bring her story to life. All is well and peaceful on the pages of her book when all of a sudden... SPLASH! One of the chickens on the page knocks over a jar of blue paint. Matters only get worse as the chicken tries to clean up her mess. With each page turn, the color blue slowly spills over the pages; washing over all colors it comes into contact with. Eventually, the entire page is blue. Despite how sorry Chicken truly is for the mess she has caused, the other animals on the page become furious with Chicken. Together with the help of a duck, they undo the blue and clean up the mess. Freedman leaves her readers anticipating yet another mess as the chicken and ducks are seen covered in red on the final page of the story.—*Melanie*

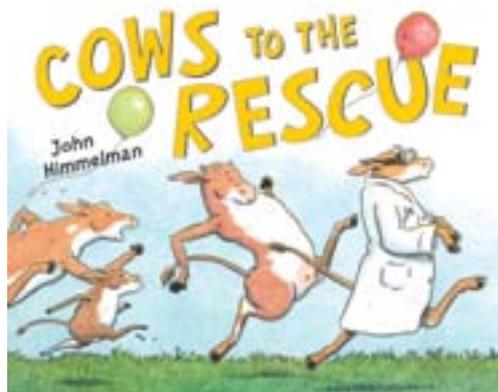
Fromer, L. & Gerstein, F. (2011). *My messy body*. (Ill. By J. Weissmann). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 24 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-202-8. (Hardcover); \$12.95.

Fromer, L. & Gerstein, F. (2011). *My noisy body*. (Ill. By J. Weissmann). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 24 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-202-8. (Hardcover); \$12.95.

Fromer, L. & Gerstein, F. (2011). *My achy body*. (Ill. By J. Weissmann). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 24 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-202-8. (Hardcover); \$12.95.

Fromer, L. & Gerstein, F. (2011). *My stretchy body*. (Ill. By J. Weissmann). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 24 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-202-8. (Hardcover); \$12.95.

Children will love learning about their sometimes unpredictable bodies while reading the *Body Works* series, co-authored by Liza Fromer and Dr. Francine Gerstein. This four-book series covers everything from growing bones to breaking wind. The two authors work together to bring readers informative and lighthearted (and sometimes embarrassing) information about the body while answering questions young children may be curious about but afraid to ask. Each topic gives a variety of fun facts, such as the speed of a sneeze, the various causes of burps, the contents of snot, and the helpful job of earwax. The authors do a great job mixing education with fun, while adding in enough “ick” factor to keep young readers interested. Illustrator Joe Weissman created pictures that are simple and clear, using watercolor and humor to complement the series. The *Body Works* series can be useful in a classroom library to share with students or an at-home collection to enjoy with the family. Everyone will find the information not only valuable, but humorous as well.—*Lynette*



Himmelman, J. (2011). *Cows to the rescue*. (Ill. J. Himmelman). New York: Henry Holt and Company. 32 pp. ISBN: 9780805092493. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

From the author of *Chickens to the Rescue* and *Pigs to the Rescue* comes *Cows to the Rescue*! Young children will love the predictable pattern this story offers as “cows come to the rescue” for the Greenstalk family. The simplicity of the story is blown up by Himmelman’s sidesplitting illustrations. This book can be used to teach sequencing, predictability, and author’s craft.—*Tara*

Hulbert, L. (2011). *Who has these feet?*. (Ill. by E. Brooks). New York: Henry Holt. 38 pp. ISBN: 9780805089073. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Hulbert's creative use of large font and simple yet colorful pictures allow young readers the opportunity to draw conclusions on what they already know about animals. As readers turn the page, they are able to make connections and build on their knowledge when they learn of each animal's feet and a brief reason of why the animal's feet are designed the way they are. For example, did you know ants have claws on their feet so they can dig underground and make their nests? Or that desert lizards have special scales on their toes so they can walk on top of the sand without sinking? Children will absolutely love to see the animals with different types of feet all together on the gatefold at the end of the story.—*Melanie*

Jacobson, R. (2011). *Picasso: Soul on fire*. (Ill by R. Jacobson & L. Fernandez). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 32 pp. ISBN: 9781770492639. (Paperback); \$8.95.

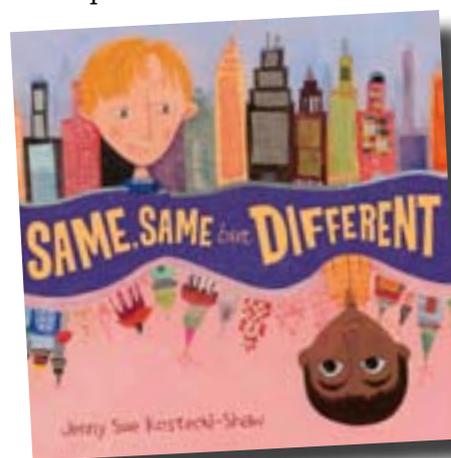
Readers will delight in learning of the inspiration behind the works of Pablo Picasso. This story not only tells of his life, but shows how his art was a true reflection of his emotions. The book includes beautiful illustrations, images of seven pieces of Picasso's artwork, and a timeline of his life. This book serves as a wonderful introduction to his life and the development of Cubism.—*Tara*

Kenney, S. (2011). *Cool city*. New York: Henry Holt. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8050-8762-8. (Hardcover); \$12.99.

The newest book in Kenney's how-to series on LEGO creations, *Cool City* invites readers to follow his visual directions for skyscrapers, subways, traffic jams, and other urban fixtures. The excellent photographs, detailed visual steps, and labels in the photos will help young LEGO aficionados engineer miniature marvels. This is sure to be one of those books that is so loved in the classroom or library that it ends up held together with book tape—a badge of honor for a children's book.—*Leah*

Kostecki-Shaw, J.S. (2011). *Same, same but different*. New York: Henry Holt. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8058-8946-2. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Celebrating sameness *and* differences is woven throughout this book as pen pals Elliott and Kailash send letters and drawings back and forth from the United States and India. The boys discover they both love climbing trees, having pets, and riding the bus to school—their experiences are just a little different between the two countries. Gorgeous multimedia collages bring the boys' letters to life and provide a rich context for visually exploring the ways the boys' lives are alike and unique. A warm story about friendship, told in authentic voices.—*Leah*



Kulling, M. (2011). *In the bag! Margaret Knight wraps it up*. (Ill. by D. Parkins). Toronto, ON: Tundra Books. 32 pp. ISBN: 9781770492394. (Hardcover); \$17.95.

Margaret Knight's struggle to prove herself as an inventor in the 1800s is shown in this inspiring story, when she invents a paper bag with a square bottom. Kulling portrays Margaret beautifully, as she allows the reader to get inside Margaret's head and experience the hardships that women faced in the 1800s. Parkins adds illustrations that show Margaret's confidence and add to the overall mood of the story. This book includes many historical references to help teach about the industrial revolution, the court system, and the role of women in the 1800s.—*Tara*

Loxton, D. (2011). *Tales of prehistoric life: Ankylosaur attack*. (Ill. D. Loxton & J. Smith). Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press. 32pp. ISBN: 9781554536313. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Dinosaur fans will delight in reading *Ankylosaur Attack*. Upon first glance at this book, one will notice the unique style of the pictures. The dinosaurs and scenery appear to be coming off the page, as if the reader is the photographer.

Loxton shares a battle between a young Ankylosaur and a Tyrannosaurus Rex in a story format that is filled with dinosaur facts and vivid language. An information page about both dinosaurs is included at the end of the story. –*Tara*

MacRae, T. (2011). *When I woke up I was a hippopotamus*. (Ill. by R. Collins). Minnesota: Lerner Publishing Group. ISBN:9780761380993. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Tom MacRae truly entertains his readers with a comical story about a boy who imagines himself changing into different creatures as he gets in trouble throughout his normal day. MacRae uses rich words along with various types of font to describe each new creature and location. This technique allows readers to easily visualize and understand the story and become enthralled in the story. I absolutely adore MacRae’s writing style, including his amusing word-play. MacRae described the boy when he turned into a monster stating, “A scratchy-scratchy monster with ten scratchy-scratchy claws. I had fifty scratchy-scratchy teeth in sciatchy-scratchy jaws.” Ross Collins’ large humorous pictures dominate most of the page. His illustrations include many small details making it interesting to study. At one point in the story, Collins depicts the mother and father as dragons. The father dragon wears big black glasses and the mother dragon has painted fingernails and a flower clip in her hair. Together, MacRae and Collins have created an enjoyable picture book for children of all ages. –*Melanie*

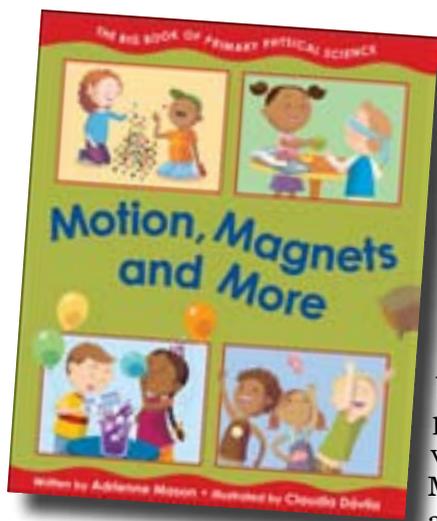
Mason, A. (2011). *The big book of primary physical science: Motion, magnets, and more*. (Ill. by C. Dávila). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. ISBN:9781554537075. (Hardcover); \$18.95.

Adrienne Mason breaks down physical science topics into four categories for young scientists in the early elementary grades to learn. The four categories, Touch It, Build It, Change It, and Move It, can be easily located by using the table of contents in the beginning of the book. There is also a basic glossary with a limited number of words and a detailed index located at the end of the book. The pictures seem appealing to the young reader’s eye, making the book “kid-friendly” and appropriate for the elementary grades. Children are able to learn about complicated science topics in a much easier way by completing various science projects discussed in the book.

One of my favorite features of *Motion, Magnets, and More* is included in the very back of the book titled “For parents and teachers.” In this section, Mason gives parents and teachers some suggestions and advice on how to further explore various topics in the book. One example included in the Magnetic Materials and Magnetic Attraction sections gives the idea of providing children with a magnet and allowing them to explore their surroundings to find different items that are magnetic. Mason reminds parents and teachers to discuss safety issues with children and remind them to stay away from electric outlets and computers. –*Melanie*

McMahon, P., (2011). *Machines of the future: Space tourism*. (Ill by A. Mora). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. ISBN: 9781554533688. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Who wants to eat dinner out of a tube of toothpaste? Yuck! Did you know that astronauts used to eat disgusting, poor quality food that was either dehydrated or pureed?



Today, astronauts have quality space meals designed by celebrity chefs like Wolfgang Puck and Rachael Ray. This fun book about space is full of interesting facts. Text features such as a table of contents, glossary, and an index make *Space Tourism* easy to navigate and quickly locate information.

In order for children to understand various complicated space topics, the text includes an opportunity for hands-on learning with the five “build it yourself” experiments. One project explains how to create a model of a space yacht, which is a hotel in space, by simply using two 20 oz. soda pop bottles, scissors, packaging tape, and two balloons. Step-by-step instructions are given on how to assemble the space yacht, as well as a brief explanation of how the model represents a real space yacht.

My favorite useful feature included in this book is the expert interview section where real astronauts talk about their personal experiences. Sunita Williams, an astronaut who was on the longest mission of any woman in history, explains how intense the g-forces are during liftoff and how she must remember to exhale. These little fun facts entertain the reader and make learning about space enjoyable.—*Melanie*

Murphy, G. (2011). *Stuff that scares your pants off! The science scoop on more than 30 terrifying phenomena!* (Ill. by M. Phillips). New York: Roaring Brook Press. 192 pp. ISBN: 9781596436336. (Paperback); \$14.99.

This nonfiction piece gives quite a different spin on all things terrifying. The story contains six chapters ranging from scary wildlife to deadly diseases. All of the chapters are laid out in the same format using statistics:

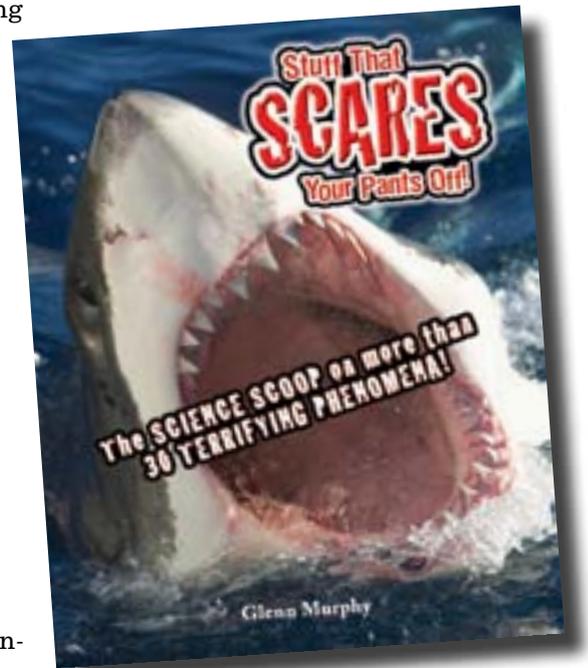
- A fact about the topic or event that has happened in the past.
- “*The Fear*” explains why people might be afraid of the topic or event.
- “*The Reality*” explains why people should not be afraid.
- “*The Chance*’s explains what the chances are that an event could happen.
- “*The Lowdown*” explains what a person could do to decrease their chances of an event occurring.

This is a great book to teach nonfiction text features to upper elementary and middle-school students.—*Tara*

Palatini, M. (2011). *Stuff.* (Ill. N.Z. Jones). New York: Katherine Tegen. 32 pp. ISBN: 9780061719219. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

In this enlightening story about materialism and charity, Edward is a hoarding rabbit who is so preoccupied with his “stuff,” that he becomes trapped. With the help of his friends, he soon realizes what’s really important. Color is used in the illustrations to change the mood of the story. The illustrations are colorful outside of Edward’s house and dark and depressing inside Edward’s house.

The story is a great lead in to discussions about materialism, charity, and using color in stories to depict mood. Ages 4-7.—*Tara*

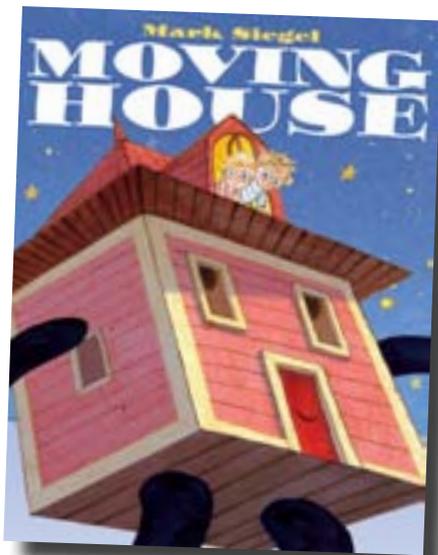


Roode, D. (2011). *Little Bea and the snowy day*. (Ill. D. Roode). New York: Greenwillow Books. 30 pp. ISBN: 9780061993954. (Hardcover); \$12.99.

Young children can find onomatopoeia and words that rhyme in this simple story about what fun it can be to play with friends. Join Little Bea and her friends as they chase snowflakes and make snow angels on a snowy day. The vivid illustrations create a beautiful contrast with the snow-covered scenery, which is imprinted with animal tracks. This will become a treasured classic for the winter season.—*Tara*

Sebe, M. (2011). *Let's count to 100!* Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. Originally published as *Kazoetegoran zebu de 100* in Japanese by Kasei-sha Publishing Co., Ltd. 24 pp. ISBN: 978-1-544-536610. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Counting + eye-spy + silly little captions throughout = playful math fun! Translated from the Japanese, Sebe's book fills each double-page spread with 100 brightly colored animals and questions to keep readers looking for math answers in the amazingly detailed cartoon illustrations. The endmatter includes a "Did you see...?" page that invites readers to go back and take an even closer look to find tiny little details that had been tucked into the animal menageries throughout the book. One of those books that young readers will revisit over and over, finding new details to delight each time.—*Leah*



Siegel, M. (2011). *Moving house*. New York: Roaring Book Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59643-635-0. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Mark Siegel, illustrator of several award-winning picture books and editorial director of *First Second*, an art project focusing on graphic novels, blends his talents as author and illustrator in this creatively drawn and cleverly told picture book. The story begins with black and white drawings, taking on a blurry, dreary effect as brother and sister, Joey and Chloe, walk down the streets of their foggy hometown. As the children happily arrive home, the illustrations become warm and bright, matching the mood of the house. The siblings are saddened to discover they are moving; leaving their comfortable, familiar house behind as they reminisce about "the warm spot on the kitchen floor...the long vrooming hallway...and [the] secret palace in the sky upstairs" (p. 8). The children find their cherished house is equally dismayed about their impending move and comes alive, working with other neighborhood buildings to create a plan to get away from the thick fog while keeping the children in the house they love. Touching on the value of older buildings, established neighborhoods, and the consequences of pollution, this entertaining picture book can help children (and adults) share in the importance a special home can take on as it seems to become a member of the family.—*Lynette*

Varon, S. (2011). *Bake sale*. (Ill. by S. Varon). New York: First Second. 160 pp. ISBN: 9781596434196. (Paperback); \$16.99.

Bake Sale is a warm-hearted graphic novel about best friends, Cupcake and Eggplant. Cupcake owns a bakery and is in a baking rut. Through a very kind gesture, Cupcake finds inspiration in an unexpected way. The simple, yet detailed illustrations add to the lightheartedness of the story, making it one students will want to read again and again. At the end of the story, seven recipes from Cupcake's Bakery are featured. *Bake Sale* is a great story to share with grades 3-5 and can be used to discuss how authors use illustrations to tell a story. It is a great mentor text to teach about graphic novels as well. A discussion guide can be found on the publisher's website: <http://us.macmillan.com/bakesale/SaraVaron>—*Tara*