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Of Cabbages and Kings: Shaping Texts and Being Shaped by Texts

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Of Cabbages & Kings: Shaping Texts and Being Shaped by Texts

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEWS BY LEAH VAN BELLE

Book clubs. Everyone's doing them, right? From libraries, to Oprah, to National Public Radio, to Facebook friends. While the club format may be more multimedia these days, book clubs are nothing new: people have been getting together with friends to talk about books for centuries because...well, how can we *not* talk about a great read? That's what friends do, after all—we talk about things we love, things that stir us up, make us cry, make us angry, make us laugh, make us think. We talk about books because we're really talking about what it is to be human.

I was thinking about this recently at the first book club meeting with a group of new friends who are also teachers. Some of us teach at the elementary school level, some middle and high school, and me at the university level—all of us connected by a love for teaching and a love for books. Our first selection was *The Help*, the bestseller by Kathryn Stockett (2009), which many of you have read or have on your to-read list. While the book club was gathered to talk about the book, what struck me was how much of the conversation was not simply about the book but our own lives, and it was fascinating to hear how the same book spoke so differently to us, how our lived experiences were lenses through which we read the book. We know that reading comprehension is an active process of construction, but it's exciting to be reminded of this in the very real, lived experience of a lively book club conversation, to see how interpretations of texts are shaped, and also how texts shape us.

It can be easy to forget the deeper implications of this in the hectic, day-to-day business of our own teaching practice, when we're focusing on teaching readers to develop and use tools for decoding, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and word study. Obviously these literacy skills are critical at the discrete word level and at more global levels of deep comprehension, and we need to support our students in developing and strategically using these skills, but what about personal response to texts? Do we remember to include in our lesson plans enough time for readers to enjoy books, to wonder, to *feel* something in response to texts of all genres?

I was thinking about this during the book club conversation because none of us prepared known-answer questions to quiz one another on the novel. None of us drafted vocabulary lists or constructed response prompts for the novel. No, we simply came bearing books, smiles, and 1950s inspired snacks, to talk about the book and what it meant to each of us—which characters we loved, which ones we pitied for their pettiness and cruel spirit, the historical context of the Jim Crow South, the messiness of a white author giving voice to the experiences of African American maids. Book club that evening was wonderful, but the book didn't stop there for me. I lent it to a neighbor, who wrote me a note about what the book meant to her as a white woman whose late husband was African American. I passed the book along to a graduate student, who wanted to read it while her mother was reading it, too so they could talk about it. I chatted with colleagues at work about it. I sat in the driveway, not turning off the car until the end of a National Public Radio segment about the controversy surrounding the book—a segment in which callers passionately discussed the book with the program host and guest. One book, so much dialogue.

Leah van Belle is an associate professor in teacher education at Madonna University in Livonia, Michigan. She has served as a member of the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award Committee, the Coretta Scott King Book Award Committee, and the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Roundtable of the American Library Association. Her educational consulting and research are related to literacy, curriculum, diversity, and children's texts.

While not all books will have the media and controversy surrounding them that *The Help* does, we need to remember that talking about books is essential for a love of reading. Beyond making great reads available to our students, we need to talk about books with them. I mean *really* talk, not simply have assessment disguised as conversations about books. Is this easy to do in today's classroom? I think many of us would answer with a resounding, "No!" But it's critically important because books don't just serve as vehicles for teaching literacy skills and tools and as materials for reading lessons. As Kathleen Kelly, Meg Ryan's independent children's bookstore-owning character in *You've Got Mail*, put it so perfectly, "When you read a book as a child, it becomes a part of your identity in a way that no other reading in your whole life does" (1998, Ephron & Ephron). I think that's what reading and book clubs do for me even now: they help me examine the world and my place in it, to understand the perspectives of others, to feel all the juiciness of life. Don't we want that for all of our students? We talk about creating "lifelong readers," but do we always make time to engage in those rich discussions with our students? I know I need to do more of this and help my teacher education students do a better job of it, too. Whether as book clubs, guided reading conversations, interactive read alouds, or reading workshop conferences, let's *talk about books*! If you're looking for new reads to do this, consider some of the new titles below.

P.S.

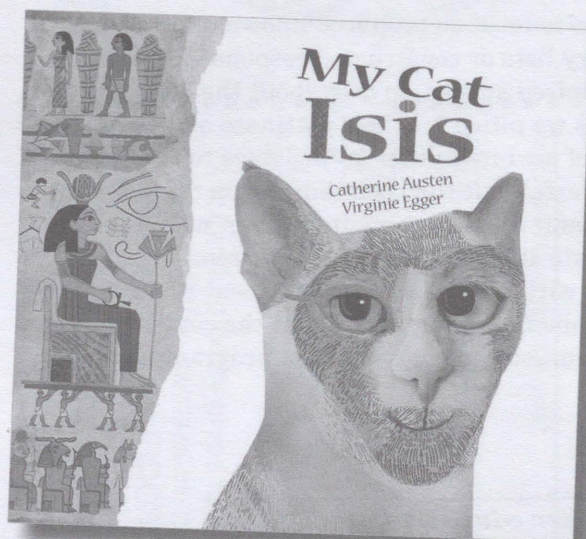
And if, like me, you want to bake a delicious homemade chocolate cream pie to take to a book club discussion of *The Help*, as an homage to Minnie's infamous pie (minus her surprise ingredient!), I recommend the first recipe in *Martha Stewart's New Pies & Tarts* (Stewart, 2011).

Austen, C. (2011). *My cat Isis*. (Ill. by V. Egger). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-413-5. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

In her first picture storybook, Austen shows us Isis the cat as seen through the loving eyes of the child who has had Isis since she was just a little kitten. On each page the narrator tells us something fascinating about the Egyptian goddess Isis, and then connects that to Isis the ever-playful cat. "Isis stood guard over the living and the dead like a devoted mother. / My Isis stands by the bird feeder and protects the seeds." Egger's illustrations are multimedia collages for Isis the cat and paintings in the style of traditional Egyptian art for Isis the goddess. A warm and fresh way of looking at pets and the special places they hold in our hearts.

Banks, K. (2011). *This baby*. (Ill. by G. Swiatkowska). New York: Frances Foster Books / Farrar Straus Giroux. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-374-37514-0. \$16.99.

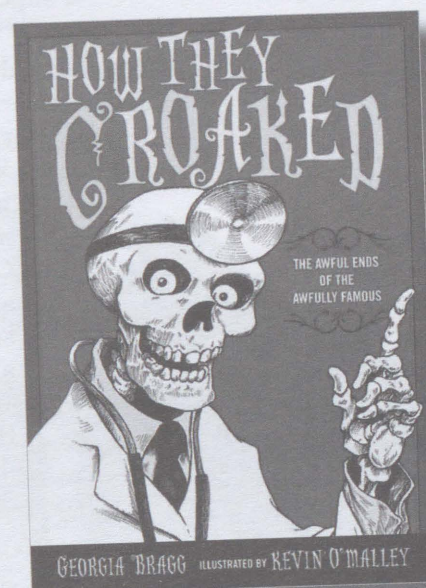
Banks' lyrical poetry and Swiatkowska's expressionist paintings dovetail beautifully to convey a young girl's nervous excitement as she waits for her baby sister or brother to arrive. Wondering what the new baby will be like, she asks her mother question after question in poetry dripping with imagery and rhythm: "This baby, / waving and kicking, / listening to Mama's heartbeat, / like a far-off drum. / Will this baby like the stars? / Knit, Mama, knit. / Stay with me. / The moon is waxing. / Soon we'll see." With every question, the little girl connects her mother's growing belly to the quietly changing seasons and favorite things from her own immediate world. She wonders about the baby liking red boots, sweet pears, and her own teddy bear. And throughout this predictable patterned book, is woven the



gentle refrain of Mama knitting and staying reassuringly close. One of the most beautiful books about a new baby that I've read in a very long time.

Bragg, G. (2011). *How they croaked: The awful deaths of the awfully famous*. (Ill. by K.O'Malley). New York: Walker Books for Young Readers. 178 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8027-9817-6. (Hardcover); \$17.99. Reviewed as an uncorrected advance proof.

Okay, okay, the title sounds dreadfully morbid, I'll give you that, but *How They Croaked* is actually a humor-filled gem, sure to draw in even the most reluctant upper elementary and middle school readers, particularly those who delight in dark humor. Bragg traces the final days and causes of death of a veritable who's-who among the nonliving. King Tut, Cleopatra, Mozart, Edgar Allen Poe, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein—the grim details of their final demises are told here with biting humor and playful pen and ink illustrations. Following each individual is a post-mortem section with further information and trivia. We learn after Marie Antoinette, for example, that she wore a *pouf*, an elaborate headdress, three-foot tall and built of wire, fabric, and horsehair. We also learn about “*Pouf* problems: / *Poufs* were unwashable. / They provided havens for spiders, mice, and bugs. / They were itchy and made it hard to dance. / *Pouf* wearers had to sleep sitting up” (pp. 80-81). Notable quotes of the departed add to their biographies: “I have no special talents, I am only passionately curious,” quipped a humble Albert Einstein (p. 159), and Pablo Picasso's last words were “Drink to me” (p. 81). Bragg includes extensive endmatter, with a research bibliography for each individual.



Bunting, E. (2011). *Hey diddle diddle*. (Ill. by M.A. Fraser). Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59078-768-7. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Eve Bunting is children's book royalty and one of those writers who has shown she can write masterfully in virtually any genre and for readers of all ages. Here she takes the beloved nursery rhyme and gives it a whimsical, musical twist, with a menagerie of animals warming up their instruments before a big performance. But, surprise! The animals are actually players in a music box, waiting for a child to wind the key and bring their music to life. Told in simple rhyme, the pace and rhythm will delight preschoolers, as will Fraser's energy-filled illustrations: the jazz trombone playing cow kicks over the bucket of milk; musical notes float in bubbles from the seal's saxophone; and the elephant gets so carried away bowing on his bass that he doesn't even notice the pages of sheet music sailing off his music stand. And through it all, the small bluebird flitting from musician to musician will be a treat for tots to follow through the pages.

Butts, E. (2011). *Shipwrecks, monsters, and mysteries of the Great Lakes*. Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books. 88 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-206-6. (Hardcover); \$14.95.

Fast-paced and action-packed, this book will hook upper elementary and middle school readers. Butts draws on historical research to spin the tales of adventures, tragedies, and legends of the Great Lakes. The wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald is framed not as the stuff of nautical history, but as the nightmarish end to a brave crew and captain. Telling the tale from the perspective of the sailors humanizes history and will engage readers. Butts' tales of the mythical creatures rumored to have lurked beneath the waters of the Great Lakes have just the right eerie, make hairs on the back of the neck stand up quality for young readers. While the book does include a bibliography, it is minimal, and there is no index. More substantive matter would strengthen the book

because general standards for expository texts for children demand rigorous endmatter. In fact, for informational book awards, such as the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award, quality and depth of endmatter is considered an essential part of the book's overall quality. Young reads are also young writers and researchers; they need to see authors documenting their research process and sources in order to give written work more credibility.

Carle, E. (2011). *The artist who painted a blue horse*. New York: Philomel Books / Penguin Group. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-399-25713-1. (Hardcover); Reviewed as uncorrected advance proof.

Vibrant hand-painted paper collages burst from oversized double-paged spreads in Carle's celebration of breaking the rules in art. After all, who says a lion can't be green or a donkey can't be adorned with polka dots every color of the rainbow?

While the book will be a delight for preschoolers and kindergartners for its playful use of color and predictable pattern text, there is an even deeper message to the book, as it serves as an homage to an artist who inspired Carle. An afterward explains that when Carle was growing up in Germany, abstract art was forbidden by the Nazi regime, yet one of his teachers secretly showed him reproductions of blue horses painted by Franz Marc, a German expressionist. That experience changed the way Carle saw art and freed him to see color in an entirely new way. In a new way indeed! His yellow cow spread across the inky blue of a star-filled sky is painted in shades and hues so rich that she glows, floats off the page to us. Another Carle book that will be an instant classic.

Colgan, L. (2011). *Mathemagic!: Number tricks*. (Ill. by J. Kurisu). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 40 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-425-8. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Children's fascination with magic seems universal, and Colgan's number tricks will make mathematicians out of upper elementary and middle school readers. In fact, these tricks are so fun, so just plain cool, that I found myself enlisting an impromptu audience to try them out. Complementing each trick is an inset titled "Secret to Success" that helps explain more of the math behind the tricks, as well as tips for giving a brilliant performance as a prestidigitator. Also included is a glossary of key mathematical terms.

Côté, G. (2011). *Without you*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-620-7. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Geneviève Côté is one of my favorite children's book illustrators. A winner of the Governor General's Award for Children's Illustration, Canada's most prestigious award for children's books, the northerly equivalent of the Caldecott Medal, she is masterful at conveying emotions, mood, and tone in her fluid watercolors. In this sweet little book, bunny and little pig seem to be total opposites: bunny is slow and careful; pig is brash and spontaneous. After an argument, they decide they don't want to be friends anymore because they can just play on their own. Alas, cookies don't taste as good eaten alone and it's hard to give a magic show without an audience. With simple shapes and washes of color, Côté conveys the friends' feelings beautifully. Their joy at rediscovering how much they love playing together is infectious: "Together we can fly, me and you!" A book to make readers feel warm and fuzzy all over.



Hartt-Sussman, H. (2011). *Noni says no*. (Ill. by G. Côté). Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books. 24 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77049-233-2. (Hardcover); \$17.95.

Côté's illustrations bring to life the endearing story of little Noni who is such a people pleaser she simply can't say no, not even when her playmate asks to cut off all of Noni's hair, save a small tuft in front to dye bright red. Noni is a gentle soul, but she learns that standing up for her herself and saying no sometimes is the brave thing to do and will actually help her have better friendships. A wonderful book to talk about feelings with preschool and kindergarten children as they see Noni experience a rich range of emotions as she tries to figure out how to say what she really means and feels.

Katz, K. (2011). *The babies on the bus*. New York: Henry Holt. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8050-9011-6. (Hardcover); \$14.99.

Katz' chubby, round-faced little babies are back in this colorful version of the traditional folk song *The Wheels on the Bus*. Singing and bouncing "bumpity bump, bumpity bump, bumpity bump" all over the town on their way to the children's museum, the multicultural babies have a grand time imitating the sounds of the bus, and preschoolers will delight in joining in on the repetitive onomatopoeia and refrain.

Labatt, M. (2011). *Witches' brew: A Sam and friends mystery; Book 4*. (Ill. by J. Rioux). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 95 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5543-472-2. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

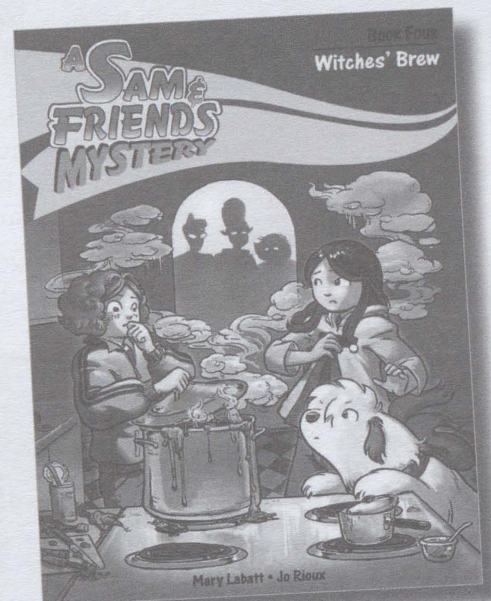
Like many elementary readers, I'm hooked on the *Sam & Friends* series. In this latest graphic novel, Sam the Saint Bernard and his person/owner, Jennie, work with their friend to solve the mystery of the disappearing pets. Certain it has something to do with their spooky new neighbors, who have to be witches, they set out on a sleuthing adventure that builds suspense with multiple layers. Sam is as resourceful and brave as ever, and solving the mystery makes Sam and the gang rethink the assumptions we sometimes all make when we first meet new people. Labatt and Rioux keep the story action-driven, and it will be devoured as a quick read.

McPhail, D. (2011). *Waddles*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8109-8415-8. (Hardcover); \$15.95.

Waddles may be a tubby little raccoon, but he proves himself to be devoted to his duck friend, Emily, and her clutch of eggs. When he bravely defends it from the sneaky fox, he is rewarded with the tickling of the new hatchlings greeting him. An unlikely little family, Waddles, Emily, and the ducklings spend the spring and summer enjoying the simple pleasures of life at the pond, until autumn comes at last and the ducks must fly south for the winter. Waddles' struggle to deal with missing his beloved adopted family is linked to the seasons of the year in a gentle, cyclical way, and his delight at the return of the ducks the following spring feels like a homecoming for everyone. McPhail's gentle watercolor illustrations, in organic shapes, surrounded by ample white space, are the perfect match for the quiet story.

Moss, M. (2011). *Nurse, soldier, spy: The story of Sarah Edmonds, a Civil War hero*. (Ill. by J. Hendrix). New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers. 48 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8109-9735-6. (Hardcover); \$18.95.

Known for her much-beloved Amelia's notebook series, Moss turns here to biographical fiction and the courageous adventures of Sarah Edmonds, who disguised herself as a man and enlisted as a Union soldier with Company F, Second Michigan Volunteer

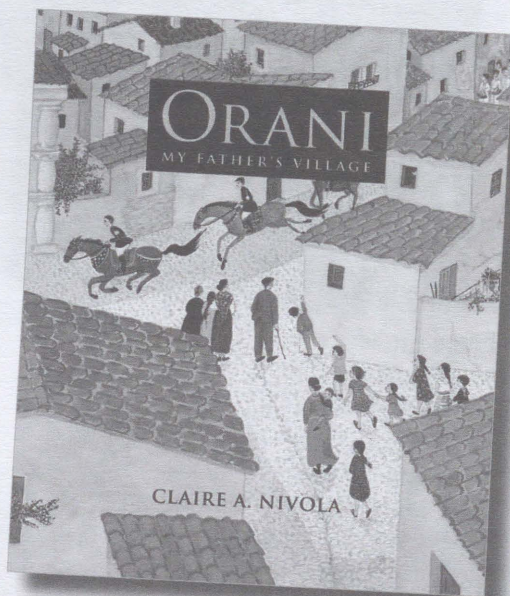


Infantry. Edmonds renamed herself Frank Thompson and not only served as a nurse, but dodged enemy fire to rescue fallen soldiers who needed medical treatment. Frank was fearless, so she was just the man for the job when the Union needed someone to spy on the Confederate encampment. Moss paces the story well, with ample, authentic-sounding dialogue to reveal characters' personalities. Hendrix, who illustrated the visually brilliant *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale (Introducing His Forgotten Frontier Friend)* (Hopkinson, 2008), builds drama and humor into the story with his watercolor and ink illustrations, including hand-lettered type (all from period billboards and photos) for dialogue running across double page spreads. The author's and illustrator's notes give the reader a glimpse into the creative process, including Hendrix's use of coloring books about the Civil War to draw uniforms. An extensive glossary, bibliography, and index provide further support for readers.

Nicholson, C.P. (2011). *Totally human: Why we look and act the way we do.* (Ill. by D. Eastman). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 40 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-569-9. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Nicholson and Eastman clearly understand that science is supposed to be *fun*! They answer the kinds of questions that matter to kids, like "WHY do you BURP and FART?" (pp. 10-11) and why we get hiccups, feel ticklish, throw up, and even shake when we're scared. Each section is comprised of: a *why* question as the bold heading; a silly, campy multimedia collage illustration setting the giggly tone; and expository text written in a style that is simultaneous highly informative and rich with humorous voice. This is the biggest treat in *Totally Human*—Nicholson's playful expository writing style. Her humor-filled pages will keep readers turning to giggle over science. This is a must-have book for every upper elementary classroom library! Enriching the text are a glossary and detailed index.

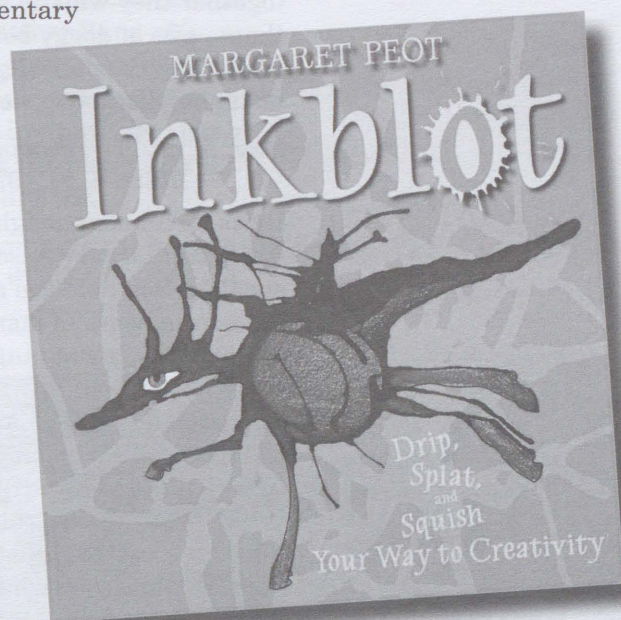
Nivola, C.A. (2011). *Orani: My father's village.* New York: Frances Foster Books / Farrar Straus Giroux. 40 pp. ISBN: 978-0-374-35657-6. (Hardcover); \$16.99.



With the same beauty and sensitivity she masterfully wove through *Planting the Trees of Kenya* (2008), Nivola brings us the autobiography of the summers she spent with her father's family in the small town of Orani, nestled in the middle of the Mediterranean island of Sardinia. Many have written nostalgically about idyllic childhood summers, but Nivola's memoir stands out for its poetic writing, at times achingly beautiful, and so rich with imagery that it becomes palpable. Describing the sound of flatbread being baked late at night in the low ovens, Nivola brings magic to even the quotidian: "If we children woke, we heard shuffling and whispers as the dough, sounding like a plump baby being playfully slapped, was patted into round balls." The adventures she shared with her large, lively group of cousins will appeal to children's sense of wonder and delight in the new, and there is also a deeper chord that will resonate with readers who have emigrated to the U.S. and find themselves wondering what "home" really means. After the summer ends, Nivola finds herself back in New York, "Everywhere there were so many people! It seemed strange that not one of them knew Orani. But then, what different world, I wondered, what Orani of their own might they have known before they traveled here?" Indeed, so many children have their own magical Oranis, and this book is a wonderful way to help them celebrate those places.

Peot, M. (2011). *Inkblot: Drips, splat, and squish your way to creativity*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press. 56 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59078-7205. (Hardcover); \$19.95.

A book so visually fascinating that middle school and upper elementary readers are certain to pore over it and try their own hands at the inkblot art Peot shows us how to create. Mind you, this is not the simple drip ink on the page, fold it, and look at the cool shape kind of blot art I remember making in school. This is inkblots taken to an entirely different level by a woman who has been a costume painter and designer for Broadway shows such as *The Lion King*. Peot uses pencils to overlay color, line, and details on her blots, surprising the reader again and again with the fascinating creatures she pulls from the inkblots. Peot shares her creative process in detail and encourages young artists to keep an inkblot sketchbook as a way of exploring and developing creativity. The book ends with a gallery of inkblots created by children of all ages.



Perl, E.S. (2011). *Chicken butt's back!*. (Ill. by H. Cole). New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8109-9729-5. (Hardcover); \$12.95.

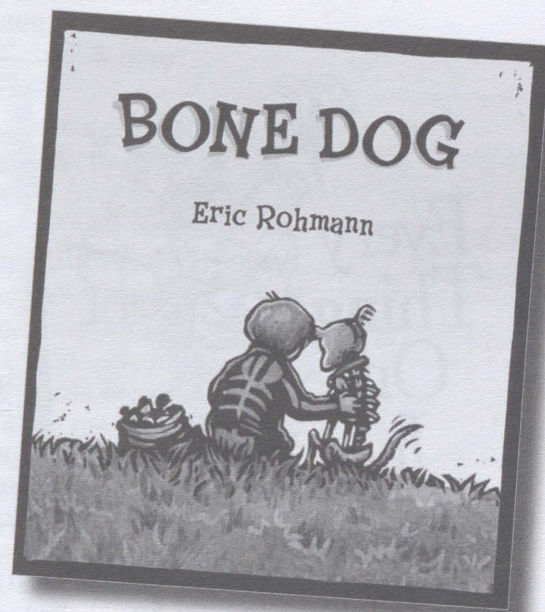
Following on the uproarious success of *Chicken Butt* (2009), Perl has created another book filled with butts, farts, and other things of a scatological humor. Young readers are sure to be left snickering as the book's mother is tricked into gross-out utterances that change reality. When the mother asks, "Who's eating under where?" the chicken munching on a box of cookies under a table suddenly finds himself with a snack of, you guessed it, tidy whities. While this may not be one of those books that works on a level the adult can enjoy as much as the child, the kindergarten crowd will find it the absolutely hysterical. And isn't the idea of them cracking up over a book again and again a great reason to add it to library and classroom collections?

Rohmann, E. (2011). *Bone dog*. New York: Roaring Book Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59643-150-8. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

A boy and his dog. Is there anything sweeter in children's literature? Well, except that I remember Dr. Linda M. Pavonetti saying once in a children's literature class I took with her as an undergrad student, "When there's a dog in a children's story, you can be pretty sure you're going to cry." That stuck with me because I remember as a child being so bitterly heartbroken by *Old Yeller* (Gipson, 1990), and I came to see that Linda was pretty spot-on about dogs and tears. Caldecott-winning author and illustrator Eric Rohmann brings us the sweet story of Gus and his beloved hound, Ella. On page 2, he sets us up for the lump in the throat:

"I'm an old dog and won't be around much longer. But no matter what happens, I'll always be with you." For a long while they sat together in the moonlight. Then Ella said, "A promise made under a full moon cannot be broken."

Looking at the illustration of Gus sitting with his arm around Ella, with the glowing moon framing them on the horizon, I braced myself for what was to come. But here is where Rohmann surprises the reader with a playful twist. Yes, Ella does pass away and Gus is very



sad, but...Halloween comes and Gus, dressed as a skeleton, finds himself in a graveyard surrounded by *real* skeletons. Ella, now a skeleton dog, comes to Gus' side and together they whistle for the neighborhood dogs to turn the skeletons into nothing more than a pile of doggy bones. The playful illustrations and artful use of space and movement keep the story light and humorous. Such a surprise for those of us expecting the usual boy-loves-dog, something-very-bad-happens-to-dog story!

Say, A. (2011). *Drawing from memory*. New York: Scholastic. 64 pp. ISBN: 978-0-545-17686-6; \$17.99. Reviewed as uncorrected advance proof.

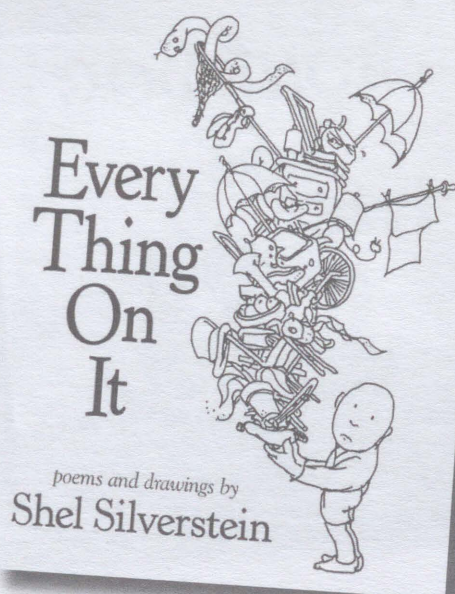
I was fortunate enough to attend the breakfast hosted by Scholastic Press at this year's American Library Association conference, a breakfast at which Allen Say was a key speaker. Say held the audience rapt as he spoke in his quiet, yet powerful voice about his newest work of memoir, in which he traces his journey from young boy reading comic books, struggling with his parents' divorce, and dreaming of becoming an artist, to living alone in an apartment in Tokyo at the age of 12, to beginning an apprenticeship with Japan's most masterful cartoonist, Noro Shinpei. Filled with photographs, sketches, and cartoon panels, the graphic novel provides readers a view into the ways in which the historical context of World War II shaped Say's childhood and path as an artist. What makes this biography so compelling is not simply learning more about a beloved author, illustrator, and Caldecott winner, but the emotional honesty and vulnerability with which Say relates his experiences. He shares with readers his secret delight in experimenting with art; his conflicted emotions about his father, from whom he hides his art; his humility in learning under a great master; his anxieties as a young man trying to learn to approach girls; and his hunger to explore America and leave his mark on the world's canvas. At times playful, with quiet joy running throughout, Say's narrative evokes a strong emotional response, and it will be hard to read the last pages without a lump in the throat and tears welling up. To read this memoir is to join Say in feeling the beauty and the sorrow in becoming an artist, in coming into one's own identity. Upper elementary and middle school readers will love this book that speaks to them in a clear, honest voice, that understands what it is to be young and figuring out one's place in this big world.

Silverstein, S. (2011). *Every thing on it*. New York: HarperCollins. 208 pp. ISBN: 978-006-199816-4. (Hardcover); \$19.99. Reviewed as uncorrected advance proof.

Many of us grew up devouring Silverstein's collections of poetry and have loved seeing our students do the same. Silverstein understood the essential experiences and feelings of childhood, and wrote in a conspiratorial way that lets children know he's on their side. *Every Thing On It* is the second volume of his work to be published posthumously; his family chose the 130 never published before poems and drawings. From the uproarious to the quiet and reflective, these are poems to make the reader feel. Silverstein's text and illustrations pair perfectly to convey mood. An absolute must-have for readers of all ages!

Spires, A. (2011). *Small Saul*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-503-3. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

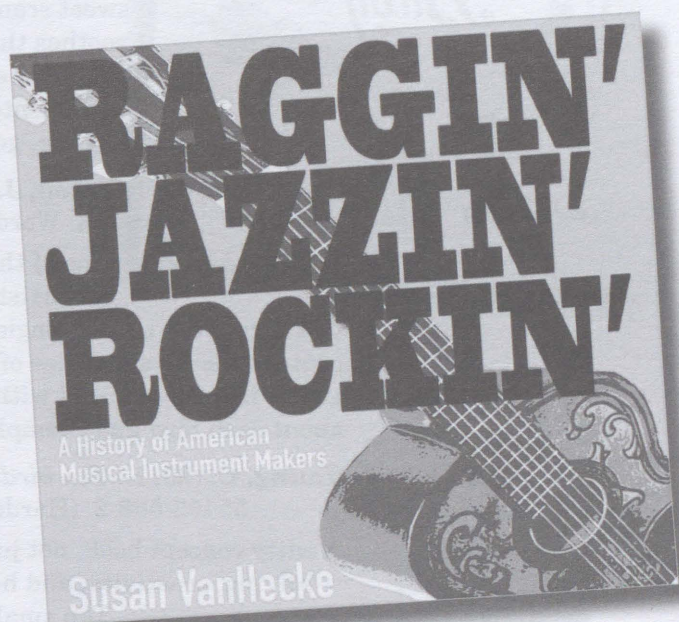
I will confess: when I saw the book's cover, I briefly thought, "Do we need another pirate story?" But the end pages filled with a pattern of skull-and-crossbones and fluffy bunnies, were my first hint that indeed we *do* need another, that is, one with a pirate as fabulous as Saul. Think HGTV meets *Treasure Island* and you'll start to get a sense of what little Saul brings to the pirate world. Too little to join the navy, he applies to



pirate college, where the only rules are "1. Never brush your teeth. 2. Take anything you want. 3. 'Arrrr' is an appropriate response to all questions." Saul is determined to transform his gentle self into the scourge of the open seas. Alas, his talents lie in baking pies for the crew, redecorating the cabins, and tenderly putting Band-aids on pirates' boo-boos. A dark soul Saul is not, so the captain tosses him overboard. But it doesn't take long for the whole crew to miss Saul's delicious cooking and way of making even a pirate ship feel warm and cozy. This may be the first time in literature that a pirate crew turns around and rescues someone they've made walk the plank, but it looks like there is room for a pirate like Saul, fuzzy bunny tattoo and all.

VanHecke, S. (2011). *Raggin' jazzin' rockin': A history of American musical instrument makers*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press. 136 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59078-574-4. (Hardcover); \$17.95.

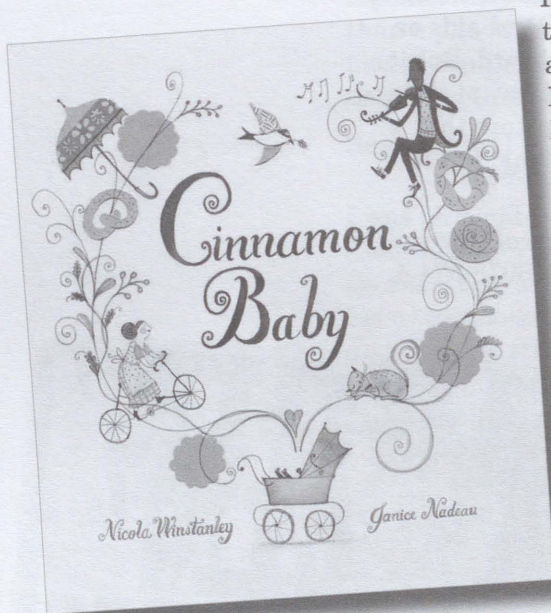
Famous American musicians and composers become part of our collective consciousness. Elvis, Stevie Wonder, Rogers & Hammerstein, Bob Dylan, Ella Fitzgerald—we know these names, can even whistle snippets, or entire, songs for which they're known. But what about the instruments they played or that gave a foundation on which their voices built? Who built those musical instruments? Susan VanHecke shares with us the stories behind the instruments behind the great music. One of these is that of the Zildjian cymbals that bear the name of the Turkish immigrants who founded a percussion legacy in early 20th century Boston. VanHecke traces the impact that the Zildjian brothers had on the Harlem Renaissance when brothers visited jazz venues, such as the Cotton Club, and met with jazz legends to find out how to make the kinds of cymbals percussionists really wanted. Filled with period photographs and artifacts, the book explores the history of percussion, brass, strings, and electrical instruments. Extensive source notes and a detailed index are the final chord to this fascinating expository text.



Willems, M. (2011). *Hooray for Amanda and her alligator!*. New York: Balzer & Bray/HarperCollins. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-0-06-200400-0. (Hardcover); \$17.99.

Amanda and her stuffed alligator are kindred spirits in the tradition of Christopher Robin and Pooh Bear. They play tricks on each other, dress up, find surprises, and just plain have fun...that is except when Amanda is reading one of her big books from the library (with must-read titles like *Climbing Things for Fun and Profit* and *Whale Songs for Beginners*). When Amanda loses herself in a book, Alligator puts on his Old Thinking Cap and finds ways to get her to play with him again. Those darn books—always so engrossing! Alligator is all spontaneity, creativity, and finding the fun in everything...until he finds a few things that aren't so fun, like the price tag on his tail that tells him he was in the bargain bin for only 7¢ (*seven cents!!*), and the new stuffed panda bear Amanda brings home from the zoo. Amanda assures Alligator that he was so inexpensive because, "No one wanted to buy you because they knew you were meant to be my best friend," and he quickly discovers that Panda loves a dress-up adventure as much as he does. Life is very sweet when you're an alligator with such great friends. Let's hope Mo Willems keeps us abreast of the further adventures of Amanda, Alligator, and Panda!

Winstanley, N. (2011). *Cinnamon baby*. (Ill. by J. Nadeau). Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55337-821-1. (Hardcover); \$16.95.



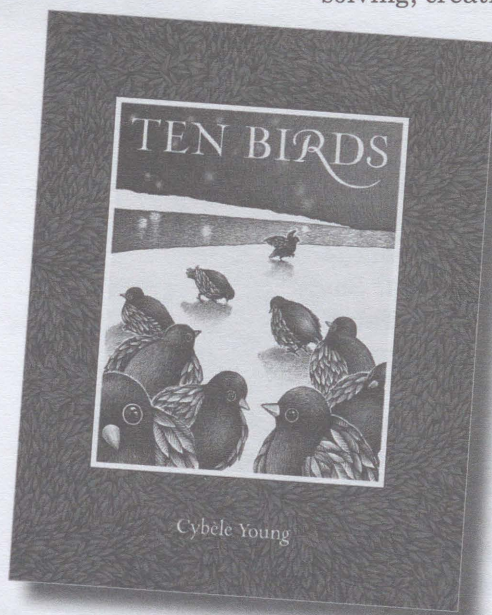
If you aren't yet familiar with the work of illustrator Janice Nadeau, this book will leave you with a craving for more of her beautiful artwork, which has won her three Governor General's Awards for Illustration. Collaborating with first time author Nicola Winstanley, Nadeau has created a gorgeous picture storybook filled with charming multimedia collages. Miriam, the town's baker, is known for her fresh, irresistible cinnamon bread, bread so delicious it makes Sebastian propose marriage. The two soon have a baby they call their cinnamon baby, for its cinnamony skin—the lovely blending of Miriam's paleness and Sebastian's mocha skin—and also because it turns out that the sweet scent of freshly baked cinnamon bread is the one thing that soothes the baby to sleep. I'm always delighted to find books with multiracial families because all our children need to see their families represented in the books they read, and *Cinnamon Baby* presents a tender, gentle story of a loving family.

Yolen, J. (2011). *Birds of a feather*. (Ill. by J. Stemple). Honesdale, PA: Wordsong. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59078-830-1. (Hardcover); \$17.95.

One of the unofficial poet laureates of childhood, Jane Yolen turns her artistry to conveying the beauty of birds in their natural habitats. From the mighty eagle to the cheeky little chickadee, Yolen's rhymed verses capture the personalities of feathered wonders with personification, rich language, and gentle imagery. Paired with her poems are boxes containing brief informational text about each bird and Stemple's close-up photographs.

Young, C. (2011). *Ten birds*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55453-568-2. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

A witty concept book, not just about numbers, but with a deeper theme of problem-solving, creativity, and how we can chose (or not) to use our talents to help others.



Ten small black birds, rendered charmingly in scratches of pen and ink, find themselves on one side of the river with a pile of contraptions—pulleys, fans, levers, wheels, bolts, and the like. Determined to cross the river, the birds one by one engineer ways to use the thingamajigs to cross the river. As they float, swim, and catapult their way across the current, it's a count-down of birds left behind. The delightful twist to the ending is that, while birds with names like "Quite Advanced" and "Shows Great Promise" schemed themselves alone across the river, it was only "Needs Improvement" who has the good sense, and good heart, to simply walk across the bridge, "leaving none behind."

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