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## Window Seat

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# Window Seat

BY LINDA M. PAVONETTI

WITH REVIEWS BY LORI A. BEACH AND LEAH VAN BELLE

**I**t's back to school again. By the time this issue arrives in your mailbox, you will be engulfed by the hustle and bustle of classroom life. In this beginning-of-the-year rush, please don't forget that reading aloud to your students is one of the most important and pleasurable methods of encouraging independent reading. Research suggests that the more students read, the better readers they become. But if they are not motivated to pick up a book—whether from your classroom, school, or public library—they will not improve their comprehension, vocabulary, and even spelling skills. For all of these can be affected by increased reading time.

Lori, Leah, and I have struggled to choose among the overwhelming number of fine books we thought you might enjoy. Michigan authors alone have published enough books to fill an entire shelf. Additionally we have reviewed some great picture storybooks, short chapter books, nonfiction, biographies, and poetry. We do invite you to check out the books that appeal to you and by all means, recommend some of these books to your colleagues and students.

Unlike you, I'm *not* back in school this fall. I am writing this column from Munich, Germany, where I am in residence at the Internationale Jugend Bibliothek—the International Youth Library—a repository of more than 530,000 children's and young adult books and references. The library is housed in a castle that the German government and publishers around the world support. For someone like me who loves children's books, this is heaven. However, because I will not be back from my sabbatical until after the winter issue is in press, there will be a guest editor for the winter 2006 issue of the Window Seat. So, until spring, please share a good book by reading it aloud to your students—regardless of their age—and enjoy your reading.

## Picture Storybooks

**Pulver, Robin.** (2005). *Author Day for Room 3T*. (Chuck Richards, Ill.). New York: Clarion Books. unpagd. ISBN: 0-618-35406-9 (hardcover); \$16.00.

Ever wonder what a "real author" is actually like? As the third-grade class at

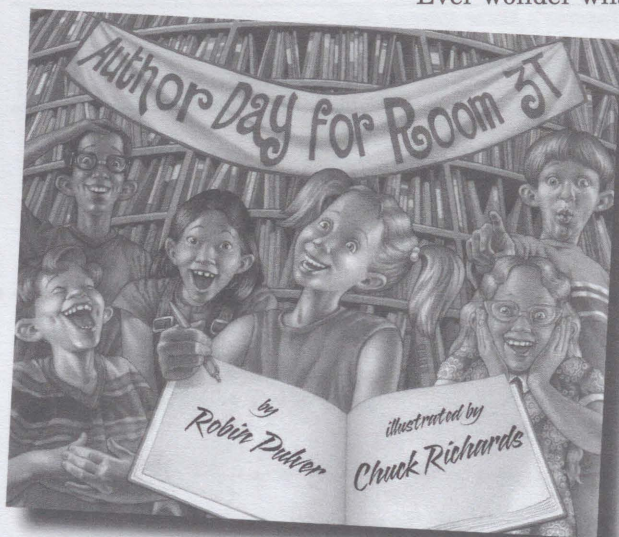
Lerner Elementary School prepares for author Harry Bookman's visit, they brainstorm questions to ask, illustrate parts of his stories, and dress up like characters from his stories. No one anticipates the hilarious events that unfold as they discover that authors are not *extra*-ordinary persons, but, "authors are ordinary people, like you and me." (LAB)

**Andersen, Hans Christian.** (2005). *The Ugly Duckling*. (Robert Ingpen, Ill.). New York: Minedition/Penguin Young Readers Group. unpagd. ISBN: 0-698-40010-0 (hardcover); \$15.99.

**Juster, Norton.** (2005). *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. (Chris Raschka, Ill.). New York: Hyperion Books for Children. 32 pp. ISBN: 0-7868-0914-0 (hardcover); \$15.95.

Grandparent-grandchild relationships are popular any time of the year, but especially in the fall when we celebrate Grandparents Day. Norton Juster, author of the classic fantasy *The Phantom Toll Booth* (1961) provides a glimpse into a loving relation-

ship between a young child and her grandparents. Chris Raschka's illustrations are perfectly suited to this quiet story.





**Yolen, Jane.** (2004). *The Perfect Wizard: Hans Christian Andersen*. (Dennis Nolan, Ill.). New York: Dutton Children's Books. unpag. ISBN: 0-525-46955-9 (hardcover); \$16.99.

This year is the bicentennial of Andersen's birth—time for a picture book biography by Jane Yolen, who, incidentally, has frequently been called the American Hans Christian Andersen because of her storytelling finesse. After familiarizing students with the author's life, present Robert Ingpen's lovely new interpretation of Andersen's most autobiographical tale, *The Ugly Duckling*. This is a great read aloud to introduce students to Andersen's more than 150 original folk tales.

**Piper, Watty.** (2005). *The Little Engine That Could*. (Loren Long, Ill.). New York: Philomel Books in association with Grosset & Dunlap. unpag. ISBN: 0-399-24467-0 (read in galleys); \$17.99.

Believe it or not, *The Little Engine That Could*, originally published in 1930, is being reissued with new illustrations. Loren Long, whose illustrations for Madonna's *Mr. Peabody's Apples* (2003) were the book's best feature, provides whimsical, bright, art in a new larger format. If you remember this book from childhood, read it again—for old times sake. It's well worth the trip down memory lane.

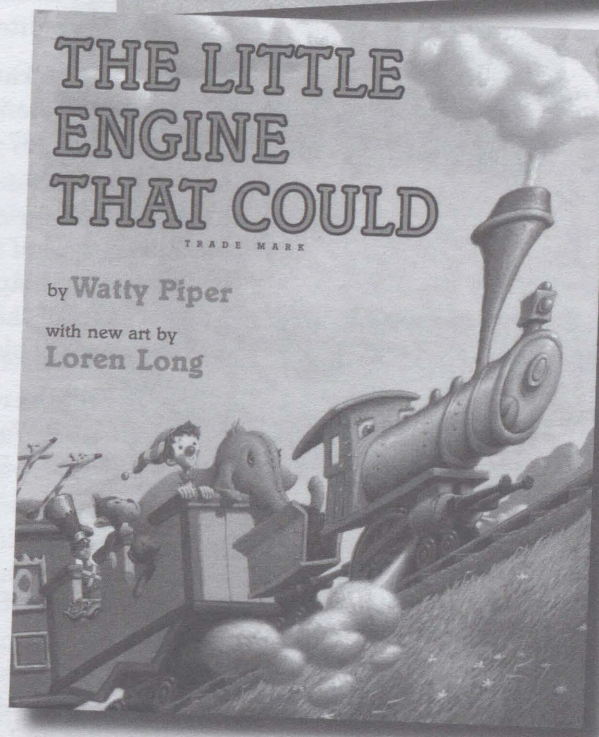
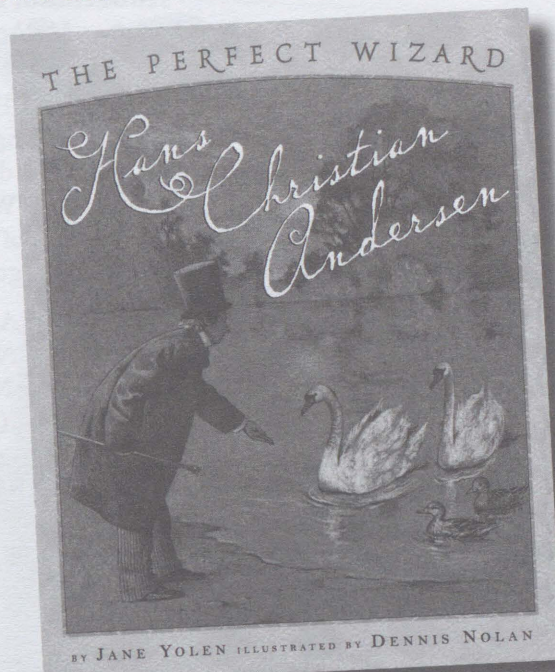
## Short Chapter Books

**Avi.** (2005). *Poppy's Return*. (Brian Floca, Ill.). New York: HarperCollins. 240 pp. ISBN: 0-06-000012-0 (read in galleys); \$15.99.

This is the latest addition to Avi's popular Poppy and Rye series. In this volume, Poppy's son, Ragweed Junior, is a rebellious teenager whose friends, language, and overall deportment mirror that of many human teens. When Poppy's sister shows up, unannounced, to say that their father is unwell, Poppy decides to make the pilgrimage back to the home of her youth. In an effort to improve her relationship with Ragweed Junior, she invites him and his best friend, a skunk named Mephitis, to accompany her. If only real life mother-son relationships would end so well.

**Lowry, Lois.** (2005). *Gooney Bird and the Room Mother*. (Middy Thomas, Ill.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 76 pp. ISBN: 0-618-53230-7 (hardcover); \$16.00.

Gooney Bird Greene is back and once again in the middle of everything. As Gooney Bird continues to tell "absolutely true" stories, she introduces new vocabulary words to her second-grade class and they receive a lesson in using their new dictionaries. The plot thickens, however, as Mrs. Pidgeon's class becomes desperate to find a room mother in time for its Thanksgiving play. Who else but Gooney Bird Greene could find a room mother that wants to remain "incognito" until the day of the play? Lois Lowry's Gooney Bird Greene continues to be an energetic character who has a delightful voice and word sense. Middy Thomas's sparse black and white illustrations highlight key scenes for Lowry's fast-paced read aloud. (LAB)





## Poetry

**Hoberman, Mary Ann.** (2005). *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You: Very Short Mother Goose Tales to Read Together*. (Michael Emberley, Ill.). New York: Little Brown. 32 pp. ISBN: 0-316-14431-2 (hardcover); \$16.99.

The third in Hoberman's *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You* series provides enjoyable choral reading opportunities for adults or children. "Humpty Dumpty" is repaired by a doctor who demands "a dollar five" in payment. Humpty Dumpty argues, "Why, that's a lot!" to which the doctor replies, "Well, you're alive!" Each of the 14 rhymes is "fractured," much like Humpty Dumpty, but it's all in good fun

**Ada, Alma Flor & Campoy, F. Isabel.** (2004). *Mamá Goose: A Latino Nursery Treasury= Un Tesoro De Rimas Infantiles*. (Maribel Suárez, Ill.). New York: Hyperion Books For Children. 121 pp. ISBN: 0-7868-1953-7 (hardcover); \$19.99.

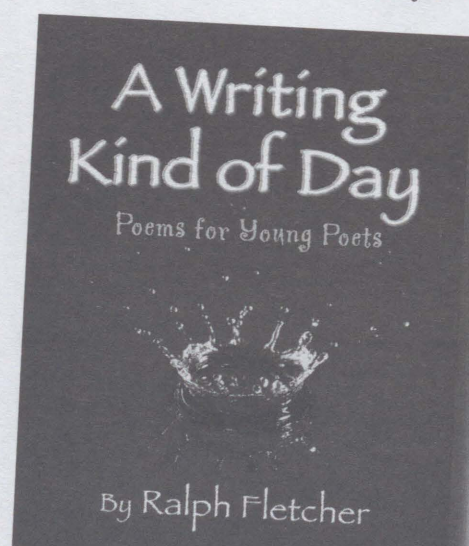
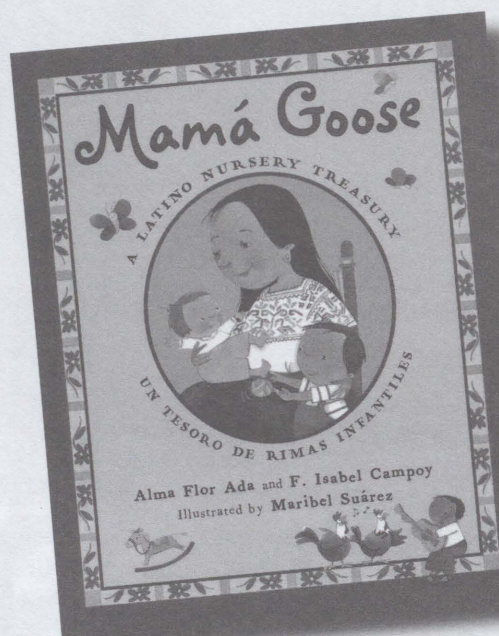
Whatever the language, Mother Goose means simple verses with strong rhyme and rhythm. That's what *Mamá Goose: A Latino Nursery Treasury* provides. In their introduction, Ada and Isabel trace the origins of these Spanish rhymes and explain how some may vary from what a parent or grandparent remembers. The authors have also interspersed some of their own original verses throughout the pages. Each Spanish verse is accompanied by an English version, creatively edited by Tracy Heffernan.

**Crawley, Dave.** (2005). *Cat Poems*. (Tamara Petrosino, Ill.). Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boys Mills Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 1-59078-287-9 (hardcover); \$15.95.

Reminiscent of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (T.S. Eliot, 1913), which was the inspiration for the musical sensation *Cats*, Crawley's 24 poems introduce every conceivable type of feline. "The Playground Cat" pounces on a shoestring, and "Grocery Store Cat" helps sell vegetables. "Mixed-Up Max" is one of the best: "My Max is a mix of this and that/(a sort of a combination cat)." For cat lovers and other pet people, this is a lot of fun.

**Fletcher, Ralph J.** (2005). *A Writing Kind of Day: Poems for Young Poets*. (April Ward, Ill.). Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boys Mills Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 1-59078-276-3 (hardcover); \$17.95.

My personal favorite for 2004 poetry book of the year was John Grandits' *Technically, It's Not My Fault: Concrete Poems* (Clarion, 2004). Fletcher's thin volume is a real contender for 2005. Take "Poetry Recipe" as an example: "... he gave me his recipe/which I followed carefully:/two similes, one metaphor,/three unusual words,/and a dash of rhyme./But my poem came out so bad/I felt like feeding it/to my Venus flytrap" (p. 8). The following pages display some of those attempts. Another clever parody of learning styles and writing-to-formulas is titled "Hungry for Poetry" (p. 19). "First of all I saw him chew/a tender Japanese haiku./He ate a foot-long sonnet/with mustard spread upon it." The couplets continue, utilizing end rhymes that include onomatopoeia and diarrhea—you get the picture. The poems are so clever and amusing they might spark interest in even the most adamantly opposed-to-poetry students.





**Janeczko, Paul B.** (2005). *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms*. (Chris Raschka, Ill.). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. 61 pp. ISBN: 0-7636-0662-6 (hardcover); \$17.99.

Master anthologizer Paul Janeczko introduces 29 poetic forms and, with the assistance of Chris Raschka's wild and crazy illustrations, turns their composition and comprehension into a game. Each form has an explanatory note on pages 56-59 that can be read in conjunction with the poem, later, or not at all. Raschka's colorful, expressionistic illustrations provide clever clues to the poetic forms.

## Biographies and Other Informational Books

**Comora, Madeleine.** (2005). *Rembrandt and Titus: Father and Son*. (Thomas Locker, Ill.). Golden, CO: Fulcrum. 32 pp. ISBN: 1-55591-490-X (hardcover); \$17.95.

Comora and Locker illuminate the life of Rembrandt van Rijn through the eyes of his son, Titus, who joins his father in the studio and on long walks through Amsterdam. Titus learns to appreciate his father's way of looking at the world, as well as the honesty with which the great master approached the canvas: "A single eye painted by my father was more true to life than all the faces painted by other artists" (p. 14). (LvB)

**Farrell, Jeanette.** (2005). *Invisible Allies: Microbes That Shape Our Lives*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux. 165 pp. ISBN: 0-374-33608-3 (hardcover); \$17.00.

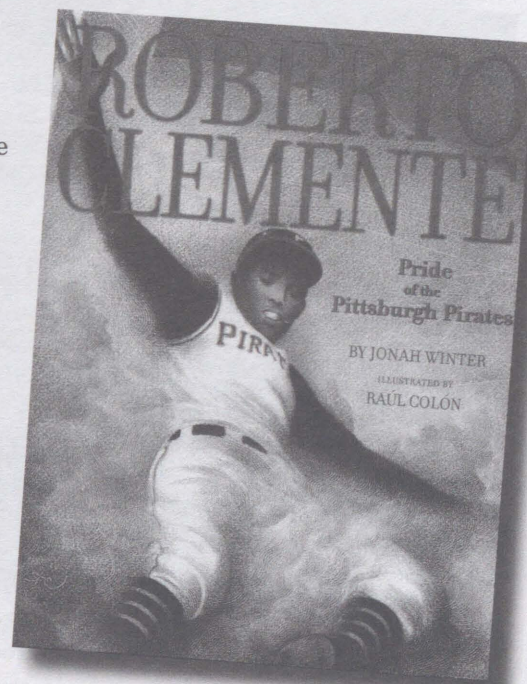
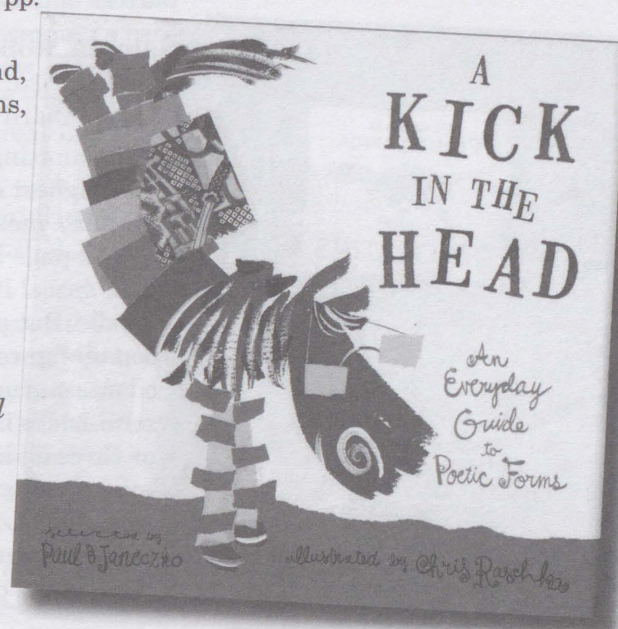
In this companion book to her award winning *Invisible Enemies: Stories of Infectious Disease* (1998), Jeanette Farrell explains how microbes were discovered and how they affect our daily lives—in positive ways. Cheese, bread and chocolate, among others, would not be part of our lives without microbes. Some of the chapters provide fascinating read aloud material for science class. Try it—then share some chocolate.

**Demi.** (2005). *Mother Teresa*. New York: Simon & Schuster/McElderry Books. 32 pp. ISBN: 0-689-86407-8. (hardcover); \$19.95.

From humble beginnings in Yugoslav Macedonia to beatification by Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa had an indelible and enduring impact on the world. Demi's biography is such a thorough examination of her life, that it even received the official blessings of Pope John Paul II. Accompanying the text are Biblical verses, prayers of Mother Teresa, and a discussion of the efforts to have Mother Teresa canonized. (LvB)

**Winter, Jonah.** (2005). *Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates*. (Raul Colon, Ill.). New York: Simon & Schuster/Antheneum. 32 pp. ISBN: 0-689-85643-1 (hardcover); \$16.95.

Books about the lives of athletes often emphasize the athletic prowess of the individual without giving a sense of the athlete as a *person*. Johan Winter and Raul Colon celebrate Roberto Clemente not only as someone who was an amazing baseball player, but also a humanitarian whose work was cut short by his untimely death. The book addresses the ways in which racism toward Puerto Ricans may have impacted fans' percep-

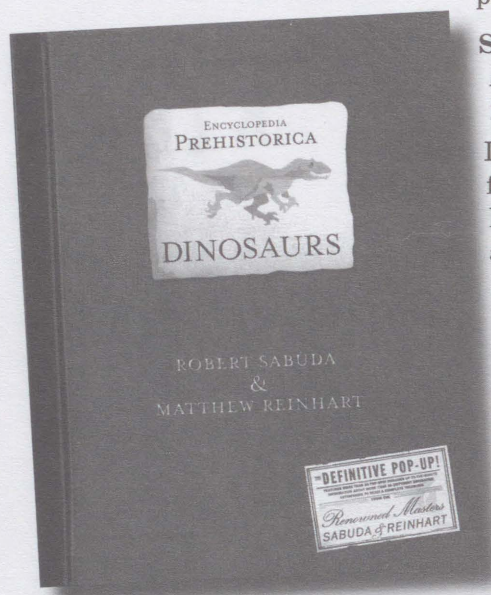




tions of Clemente's performance on the field, even as he was outplaying most ball players of his time. (LvB)

**Sabuda, Robert & Reinhart, Matthew.** (2005). *Dinosaurs: Encyclopedia Prehistorica*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. unpagged. ISBN: 0-7636-2228-1 (hard cover); \$26.99.

In six amazing double-page spreads, Robert Sabuda manages to surpass his fans' highest expectations for this much-heralded paper engineered spectacular. But *Dinosaurs: Encyclopedia Prehistorica* cannot rightfully be described as a 12-page book: it needs to be measured in inches—a full 2 1/2 inches of shelf space! It was almost too big for my favorite dinosaur expert, Max, to handle. But pore over it he did: drinking in the details of not only the large pop-up figures of T-Rex, ankylosaurus, triceratops, brachiosaurus, carcharodontosaurus, and archaeopteryx, but concurrently opening the three or four mini-books included on each spread. Each of them, in turn, contains one, two, or three additional pop-ups. One of the small books, "Dinosaur Detectives," even displays Waterhouse Hawkins' New Year's Eve dinner party inside one of his London replicas. As you might expect, the large pop-up figures are spectacular—and delicate. But they are not flimsy. It's worth the rather hefty price of \$26.99.



## The Michigan Connection

**Barker, Charles Ferguson.** (2005). *The Day the Great Lakes Drained Away*.

Traverse City, MI: Mackinac Island Press. unpagged. ISBN: 0-9749145-2-5 (hardcover); \$18.95.

Charles Barker presents an interesting scenario of what would happen if the Great Lakes were drained by "just one little pipe." *The Day the Great Lakes Drained Away* is sure to become a springboard for discussions about the water cycle and water conservation in Great Lakes classrooms. The power of the story is not in its words or drawings but in the underlying message: We must all work together to keep the Great Lakes safe. (LAB)



**Celenza, Anna Harwell.** (2005). *Bach's Goldberg Variations*. (JoAnn E. Kitchel, Ill.). Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. unpagged. ISBN: 1-57091-510-5 (hardcover); \$19.95.

*Bach's Goldberg Variations* is the fourth in Michigan State University professor Anna Celenza's popular series of picture storybook accounts of famous musical compositions—and their composers. This fictionalized account fleshes out a segment of Johann Sebastian Bach's biography. An "Author's Note" clarifies what is fact and what is embellished. Celenza has also written *The Farewell Symphony* (2000), *Pictures at an Exhibition* (2003), and *The Heroic Symphony* (2004) and promises a new release in 2006, *Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue* that moves her musical fiction into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Cowley, Joy.** (2005). *Chameleon, Chameleon*. (Nic Bishop, Ill.). New York: Scholastic Press. unpagged. ISBN: 0-439-66653-8 (hardcover); \$16.95.

Kalamazoo scientist and photographer, Nic Bishop, teams up with author Joy Cowly to produce a companion to their award-winning *Red-Eyed Tree Frog* (Scho-



lastic, 1999). *Chameleon, Chameleon* provides more information, both visually and textually, than its predecessor, but the photographs are just as amazing. In one double-page spread, Bishop captures the image of the chameleon zapping a caterpillar with its tongue. The following page displays three frames, "Chew, chew, gulp." There are numerous photographs of other chameleons, geckos, and frogs to provide opportunities for readers to compare and contrast the variety of creatures the chameleon encounters on his journey from one tree to another.

**DiPucchio, Kelly S.** (2005). *Mrs. McBloom, Clean up Your Room!* (Guy Francis, Ill.). New York: Hyperion Books For Children. unpagd. ISBN: 0-7868-0932-9 (read in galley); \$15.99.

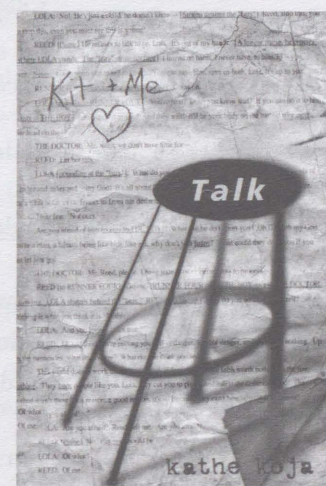
"There were more books stacked in Mrs. McBloom's room than there were in the entire Up Yonder Library." She had been meaning to clean her overcrowded classroom for years. It even made it to the top of her to-do list. "Oh, higgly-piggly .... See, it's listed right here above *Take a fancy-shmancy cruise*." How would Mrs. McBloom ever get the job done so she could retire? The kids are the heroes in Detroit author Kelly DiPucchio's rollicking spoof on those of us who can't stand to part with anything that comes through the doorway.

**Greene, Rhonda Gowler.** (2005). *Firebears: The Rescue Team.* (Dan Andreasen, Ill.). New York: Henry Holt. unpagd. ISBN: 0-8050-7010-9 (hardcover); \$15.95.

Great for the preschool set—quick paced, lots of fire engines and action.

**Koja, Kathe.** (2005). *Talk.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux/Frances Foster Books. 134 pp. ISBN: 0-374-37382-5 (hardcover); \$16.00.

The cast for "Talk," Faulkner High School's big production, is world's apart from the usual high school musical spectacular. It's controversial—in the school, in the community, and even among the cast members and their families. But for stars Kit Webster and Lindsay Walsh, the drama is as much internal and spontaneous as it is scripted. As the multiple plotlines unravel, *Talk's* cast members each uncover surprising self-revelations. Interspersed throughout the novel are graying, crumpled-looking pages from the play's script. This young adult novel is a must-read for all who are concerned with student rights and freedom of speech. Koja is the Detroit-area author of three other YA novels: *The Blue Mirror* (2004), *Buddha Boy* (2003), and *straydog* (2002).



**Polacco, Patricia.** (2005). *Emma Kate.* New York: Philomel Books. unpagd. ISBN: 0-399-24452-2 (hardcover); \$16.99.

This is a departure from the usual Polacco multi-hued palette. Except for Emma Kate's green shoes, red dress, ribbon, and socks—and an occasional pale highlight (the mouse's tail, ears, and cheeks)—the book is illustrated in elephant-gray graphite. Polacco's sparse text is perfectly within the range of new and emergent readers. What makes this book so dynamic is its point of view: Who is the narrator?

**Rodowsky, Colby F.** (2005). *The Next-Door Dogs.* (Amy J. Bates, Ill.). New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux. 103 pp. ISBN: 0-374-36410-9 (hardcover); \$15.00.

Being a child is difficult work. For 9-year-old Sara Barker, one of her most difficult tasks is hiding a phobia from her family and her best friends, Jessica and Cindy. Ann Arbor resident Amy Bates provides just enough information in her black and white



illustrations to capture young chapter book readers' interest.

**Stauffacher, Sue.** (2005). *Harry Sue*. New York: Random House/Knopf. 272 pp. ISBN: 0-375-83274-2 (read in galleys); \$15.95.

"Harriet Susan Clotkin is not the sort of name you'd imagine for the first lady president of the United States. That's just fine by me, as I never had designs on running for political office but planned instead on following in the family tradition: a career of incarceration. As soon as I was old enough ...." While she's waiting, this felon in training lives with her Granny, as miserable an excuse for a human as pencil has ever drawn. Harry Sue's life is the stuff of nightmares, but the way she tells it, there's more laughter than tears. Included, free of charge, is "Harry Sue's Joint Jive Glossary" and "slammer slang."



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