

January 1999

Bookpourri: Reviews of Books for Children

Vera E. Milz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation


Milz, Vera E. (1999) "Bookpourri: Reviews of Books for Children," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 31: Iss. 2, Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol31/iss2/9>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Bookpourri: Reviews of Books for Children

Vera Milz is a second-grade teacher at Conant Elementary School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. She is a past president of the Oakland County Reading Council.

 Choosing books for this column has always been a joy, and I hope that you will agree that this collection of books is the latest reason. I am always amazed at the wide range of ideas reflected in each category of books. The Poetry Section, for example, has both poems in a single picture book as well as collections of poetry. The subjects range from poems about Native Americans to *A Mother's Love* to *Journeys* to various parts of our country. James Marshall's last gift to us is when he illustrates one of the nonsense poems of Edward Lear. This is only the tip of the riches found in this section. As you read my column, I hope that each of you will find books that will bring you joy and enrich your classrooms. If you have a favorite book that you can recommend to others, please tell me about it for use in a future column. Send your suggestions to 1750 Woodgate Drive, Troy, Michigan, 48083.

Note: As I was gathering books for this column, I received a listing of the children's authors and illustrators who will be appearing at the MRA Conference in March. They are indicated with an asterisk..

.....

FOR THE PICTURE BOOK CONNOISSEUR

Browne, Anthony. *Willy the Dreamer*. (Candlewick, 1997, \$16.99, ISBN 0-7636-0378-3)

A celebration of the power of the imagination is contained in this book of Willy's dreams. He dreams of the past and the future, of being a movie star, a singer, an explorer, an artist, or writer. There are no limitations, just countless possibilities as Willy dreams. We all need to remember to dream and to follow those dreams.

Jones, Bill T. and *Kuklin, Susan. *Dance*. Photographs by Susan Kuklin. (Hyperion, 1998, \$14.95, ISBN 0-7868-2307-0)

With exquisite photographs and concise text, Kuklin shows the acclaimed dancer, Bill T. Jones, as he uses his body to dance. Jones states, "Dance is action and shape designed in shape and time to express feelings and ideas." The book brings the statement to life.

Lewin, Ted. *The Storytellers*. (Lothrop, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-688-15178-7 TR)

Abdul and his grandfather are walking through the streets of Fez, Morocco, as they go to the special place where they will spread a carpet on the ground and wait for a crowd to gather. Grandfather is a storyteller, and Abdul believes it is the best job in the whole

city. Lewin followed an actual storyteller on his way to the place where he wove his ancient tales and found his own idea for this special book for us to enjoy.

Meddaugh, Susan. *Martha Walks the Dog*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1998, \$15.00, ISBN 0-395-90494-3)

Martha, the talking dog, is back for her latest adventure. She loves her daily walk until, one day, she meets a new dog in the neighborhood, a bully named Bob. Bob and his owner are both mean and ferocious. They are always barking and yelling at each other. When Bob escapes and tries to attack Martha, both learn the power of a kind word.

Simms, Laura. *Rotten Teeth*. Illustrations by David Catrow. (Houghton Mifflin, 1998, \$15.00, ISBN 0-395-82850-3)

Melissa Hermann finds it difficult to speak in front of her class and even more difficult to find something to bring to talk about. Her father is a dentist with an office in his home, and when she decides to take a big glass bottle of rotten teeth that he has pulled, she becomes an instant celebrity with her classmates. She finds that she is a natural storyteller as she elaborates on where the teeth came from, and she has lots to tell from that point on. Based

on an incident from her own life, the author's story provides inspiration for shy children to discover their own talents.

Palatini, Margie. *Zoom Broom*. Illustrations by Howard Fine. (Hyperion, 1998, \$14.95, ISBN 0-7868-0322-3)

In this sequel to *Piggie Pie*, Gritch the Witch has a problem with her broom. She heads to the nearest used broom dealer to find a replacement. The negotiations between the witch and the foxy, smooth-talking salesman will bring plenty of laughs to young readers, and all will be surprised at the witch's final choice of transportation.

*Wegman, William. *My Town*. (Hyperion, 1998, \$17.95, ISBN 0-7868-2360-7)

Wegman's wonderful Weimaraners are back to entertain us with their latest antics. Chip has a report due, and he hasn't even chosen a topic. He wanders around town looking for ideas. He talks to the policeman, the photographer, the mailman, the fireman, a beautician, a doctor, and a mechanic. Finally, he decides on a photographic essay, which of course, features all the town's workers depicted as dogs. The back cover gives some clues as to how these unique photographs are created.



BEGINNING CHAPTER BOOKS

Adler, David A. *The MANY Troubles of Andy Russell*. Illustrations by Will Hillenbrand. (Gulliver/Harcourt Brace, 1998, \$14.00, ISBN 0-15-201295-8)

This book introduces Andy Russell, a fourth-grader who seems to get into a lot of trouble without even trying. As the story opens, Andy's gerbils have escaped and are loose in his basement. He tries to keep their escape a secret from his parents, but he's already late for school and doesn't have time to look for them. When he returns home to begin the round-up, he finds he isn't the only one with a secret in his family. His parents have one of their own, which will definitely mean more problems for Andy. I'm

looking forward to the continuation of Andy's story in his next adventure.

*Bauer, Marion Dane. *Alison's Wings*. Illustrations by Roger Roth. (Hyperion, 1996, \$13.95, ISBN 0-7868-0105-0).

Alison is a little girl who dreams of having wings – girl wings that would let her soar up to the clouds. Her parents arrange for an airplane ride, and her grandpa makes her a high-flying swing. However, it just isn't the same as flying on your own. Then, one night in her dreams, Alison receives her wish. This is a gentle story bound to please young readers with dreams of their own.

Gilson, Jamie. *Bug in a Rug*. Illustrations by Diane de Groat. (Clarion, 1998, \$15.00, ISBN 0-395-86616-2)

Richard's Uncle Ken and Aunt Nannie come to visit, and they bring him a pair of large purple pants. Then he has to wear them to school when his regular pants get soaked in an accident. The pants are so big that they keep falling down. Next, at school, each person in the class gets a petri dish with mealworms to study, and Richard names one after his crazy Uncle Ken. When the real Uncle Ken comes to school, it's just one more problem for Richard to handle. There are plenty of laughs in this latest adventure of Mrs. Zookey's second-grade class.

*Korman, Gordon. *Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire*. Illustrations by JoAnn Adinolfi. (Scholastic, 1997, \$14.95, ISBN 0-590-27142-3).

Zoe Bent makes up so many stories that no one in her class believes what she says. When the class studies eagles, Zoe claims to have a nest in her backyard tree. The story isn't true, so Zoe tries to make a nest using glue, peanut butter, leaves, and her mother's wok. When an eagle actually visits, she tries to take a picture, but none of the pictures turn out. Poor Zoe! Will she ever learn to tell the truth? Then something happens that helps her put everything in the proper perspective.

Mills, Claudia. *Gus and Grandpa at the Hospital*. Illustrations by Catherine Stock. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, \$13.00, ISBN 0-374-32827-7)

Gus loves to visit his grandpa. One of their favorite things to do is get the mail and answer it. The next day after a visit, Gus learns that his grandpa had a heart attack and is in the hospital. Fortunately, Grandpa pulls through, and Gus is able to visit him and finally help to bring him back home. This is a gentle story with a wonderful message of the love between a boy and his grandfather, as well as a way for children to relate to the illness of a special relative.

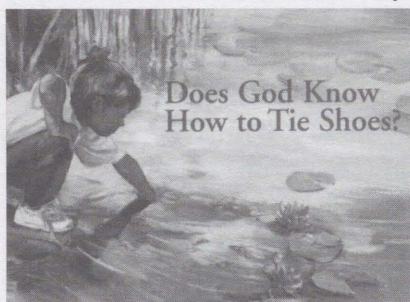
Rylant, Cynthia. *Poppleton Forever*. Illustrations by Mark Teague. (Blue Sky/Scholastic, 1998, \$14.95, ISBN 0-590-84843-7)

When Poppleton the Pig encounters various problems – a wilting tree, a bad cold, and trying to hang his wallpaper the right way – he finds that his friends have lots of good advice. Most of all, they are all ready to be there and lend a helping hand. Each chapter illustrates just how precious friendship can be, a lesson that each of us needs to always remember.

.....

MICHIGAN CONNECTIONS

Carlstrom, Nancy White. *Does God Know How to Tie Shoes?* Illustrations by Lori McElrath-Eslick. (Eerdmans, 1997, \$15.00, Read-along Book with Cassette, ISBN 0-8028-85089-8)



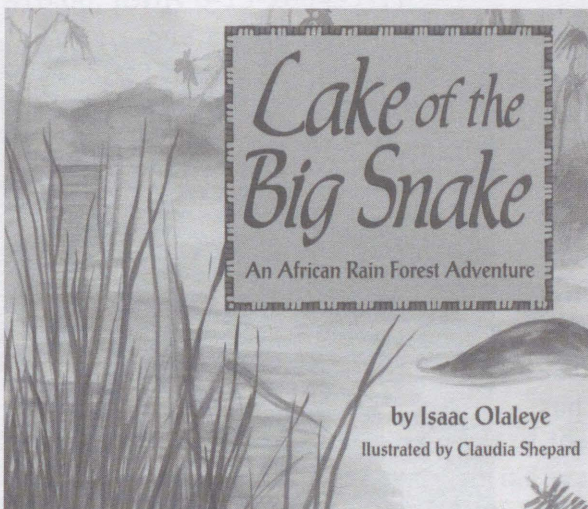
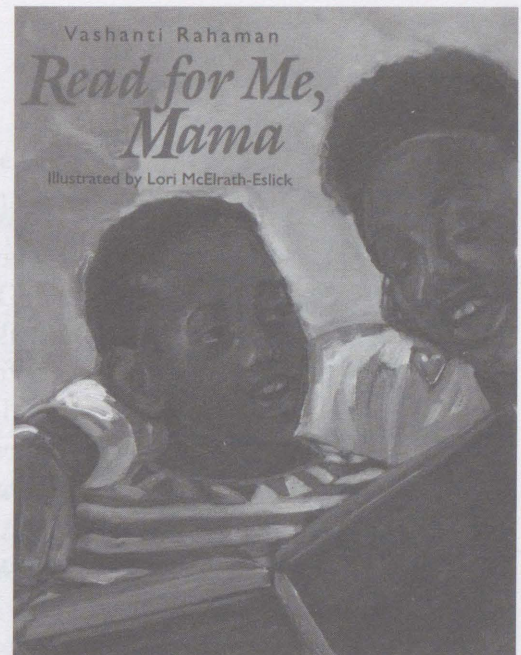
When a little girl spends a day in the country with her parents, she begins to ask them questions about God: Can God talk? Does God cry? The parents' responses are based on the words from the Psalms in the Bible, and help the child to understand what God is like. The lush illustrations are by Lori McElrath-Eslick, an illustrator who lives in North Muskegon, Michigan.

*Sabuda, Robert. *ABC Disney*. (Disney, 1998, \$22.50, ISBN 0-7868-3132-4)

This unique pop-up has a Disney character for each letter of the alphabet, such as B for Bambi, M for Mulan, P for Pinocchio, and T for Tinkerbell. Each frame is a delight to open and brings memories of past and current movie favorites. The Michigan-born illustrator currently lives in New York City.

Rahaman, Vashanti. *Read for Me, Mama*. Illustrations by Lori McElrath-Eslick. (Boyd's Mills, 1997, \$14.95, ISBN 1-56397-313-8)

Each week, Joseph goes to the library and brings two books home. One he can read himself, but the other one is harder so someone must read it to him. His mama is a great storyteller, but she always gets someone else to read to Joseph. Finally, it comes out that Mama cannot read. Together they face the challenge of helping her, and as the story ends, they are enjoying a book together. The paintings by this Michigan author evoke the poignancy and power of attaining literacy by the child and his mother.



Olaleye, Isaac.

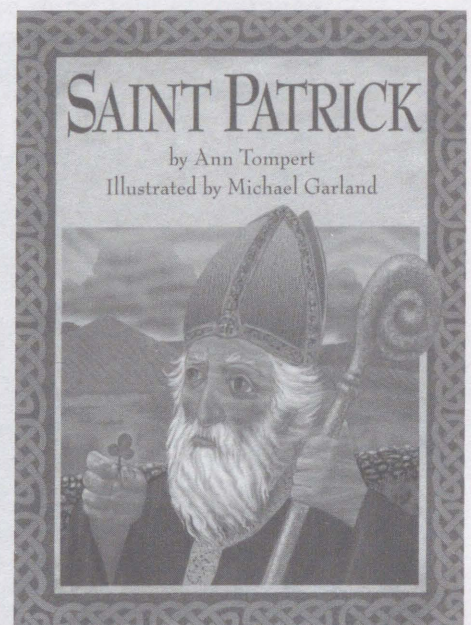
Lake of the Big Snake: An African Rain Forest Adventure. Illustrations by Claudia Shepard. (Boyd's Mills, 1998, \$15.95, ISBN 1-56397-096-1)

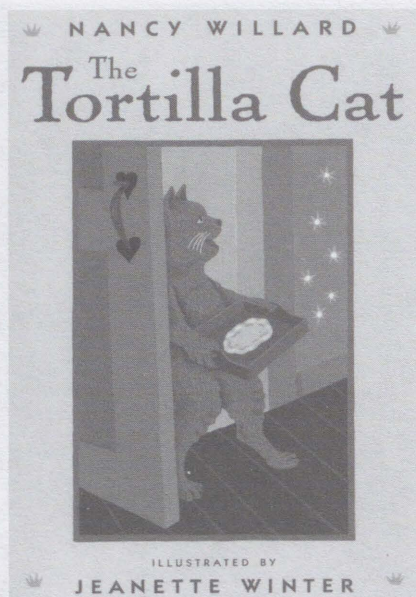
Two boys are told not to leave home when their mothers need to go away to visit a neighboring village. The temptation of playing in the nearby jungle proves to be irresistible, and soon the boys are crossing the Lake of the Big Snake. They find delicious

berries on the other side as well as a big, dangerous water snake in the lake between them and home. Working together, the two friends are able to escape just in time to face the return of their mothers. The beautiful illustrations were created by a Royal Oak artist.

Tompert, Ann. *Saint Patrick*. Illustrations by Michael Garland. (Boyd's Mills, 1998, \$14.95, ISBN 1-56397-659-5)

Using quotes from a letter written by St. Patrick, the author creates a biography for children to enjoy. Few facts are actually known about this beloved man whose mission in life was to bring Christianity to Ireland during the fourth century. He suffered many hardships, but never lost sight of his goals during the 30 years he lived in the country. Some of the legends that arose after his death are mentioned in the author's note in the back of the book. The author resides in Port Huron, Michigan.



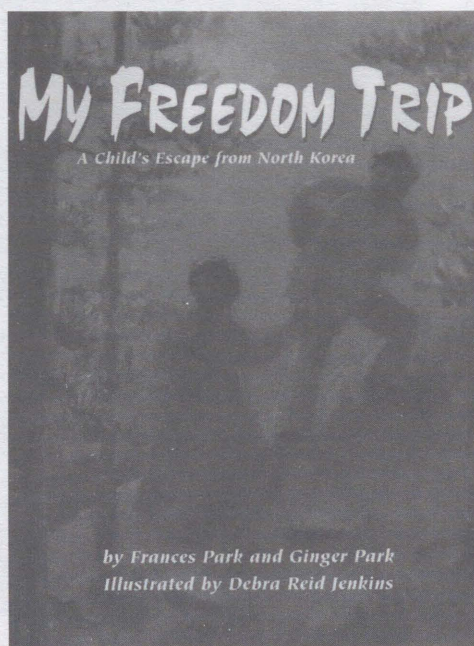
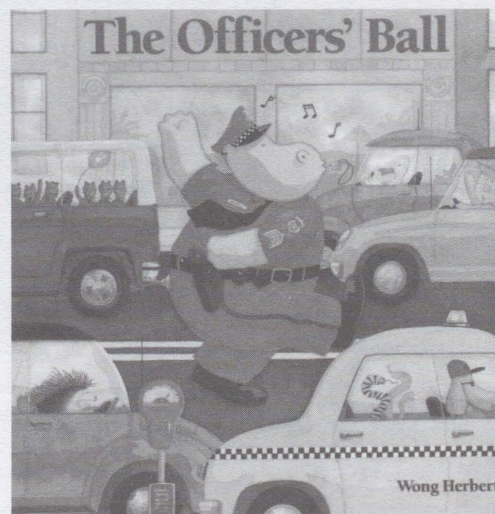


Willard, Nancy. *The Tortilla Cat*. Illustrations by Jeanette Winter. (Harcourt Brace, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-15-289587-6)

Doctor Romero is a wonderful doctor, but when a terrible fever strikes, there is nothing he can do to save his patients. Even his own wife dies, and his five children are stricken with the disease. Yet each child is cured by a little gray cat that brings a healing tortilla for them to eat. The doctor believes it is just a hallucination caused by the high fever until he gets sick and receives a visit from the little cat. The gentle story is by a Michigan-born author who now resides in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Yee, Wong Herbert. *The Officers' Ball*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1997, \$14.95, ISBN 0-395-81182-1)

Sergeant Hippo is a wonderful policeman. He catches crooks, escorts an expectant mother to the local hospital, writes out tickets, and directs traffic, all the while worrying about the officers' ball that is taking place that evening. He even finds time for a little practice between his various crises. When the time arrives, he has a great time and is one of the best dancers there. This Troy, Michigan, author-illustrator has created another rhyming delight for young readers.



Park, Frances and Ginger. *My Freedom Trip: A Child's Escape from North Korea*. Illustrations by Debra Reid Jenkins. (Boyd's Mills, 1998, \$15.95, ISBN 1-56397-468-1).

Based on stories of their own mother's childhood, the authors have told of the escape of a small Korean girl from North Korea just before war broke out. The child has to travel with a stranger leaving her mother behind, while hoping to reach the safety of her father's arms in South Korea. She must be brave as she and her guide encounter enemy soldiers before she is reunited with her father. Dark night paintings by a Lowell, Michigan, artist capture the danger and sadness of this journey toward freedom.

POETRY CORNER

Asch, Frank. *Cactus Poems*. Photographs by Ted Levin. (Gulliver Green/Harcourt Brace, 1998, \$18.00, ISBN 0-15-200676-1)

North American deserts with their rocks, wildlife, and plants are considered in all their strange and awesome glory in this fascinating volume. The book will never substitute for an actual trip to this desolate, but amazing world, but it will certainly introduce the reader to the desert and whet their appetite for an actual trip.

*Florian, Douglas. *On the Wing: Bird Poems and Paintings*. (Harcourt Brace, 1996, \$16.00, ISBN 0-15-200497-1)

Twenty-one exotic to common birds are introduced in this collection. The egret, the quetzal, the royal spoonbill, and the Andean cock-of-the rock are just a sampling of the poems, accompanied by paintings, to be found in this unique book.

Lear, Edward. *The Owl and the Pussycat*. Illustrations by James Marshall. (HarperCollins, 1998, \$15.95, ISBN 0-06-205010-9)

The unusual romance and wedding of the owl and the pussycat from Lear's ballad are depicted in this treasured final gift to children by one of their most loved illustrators. From the moment they leave home with all their luggage to their wedding dance by the light of the moon, the owl and the pussycat will entertain their latest audience. I especially love the piggy who sold his nose ring to provide the wedding ring for the nuptials, although all the animals are sure to bring a special delight.

Locker, Thomas, editor and illustrator. *Home: A Journey Through America*. (Silver Whistle/Harcourt Brace, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-15-201473-X)

Poems by celebrated writers that describe our homeland were chosen for this anthology. Glorious paintings join with

their words to celebrate the many places we call home in America. Muir's beloved Yosemite Falls, Irving's Hudson River Valley and Bruchac's Northern Texas are just a few of the many places that are the subjects of the poems and paintings of this book. Locker's spectacular landscapes will please the reader's eye.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Angel to Angel: A Mother's Gift of Love*. (HarperCollins, 1998, \$15.95, ISBN 0-06-027721-1)

The collection of poems celebrates the special bond between a mother and her child. Myers' original poetry is accompanied by photographs – some over a hundred years old – that he has collected for many years and which define the feeling of love in this special relationship.

Swann, Brian. *The House with No Door: African Riddle-Poems*. Illustrations by Ashley Bryan. (Brown Deer/Harcourt Brace, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-15-200805-5)

Original poems were created based on African riddles collected by the author. They are accompanied by paintings that contain one answer to the riddle, as well as other possible answers. Readers are definitely encouraged to find their own answers in light of how they view the world – a powerful way of reminding us how we each make meaning as we read a book.

Wilbur, Richard. *The Disappearing Alphabet*. Illustrations by David Diaz. (Harcourt Brace, 1997, \$16.00, ISBN 0-15-201470-5)

The verses in this book are designed to let you think about what would happen if letters of the alphabet disappeared. For example, "What if there were no letter A? Cows would eat HY instead of HAY." That's just the start of funniest un-phonics lesson you can imagine. It's amazing what we can read without "sounding it out."

Wood, Nancy. *Sacred Fire*. Illustrations by Frank Howell. (Doubleday, 1998, \$25.00, ISBN 0-385-32515-0)

The wisdom, history, religion, legends, and philosophy of the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest are the basis for the poetry and prose found in this book. Magnificent paint-

ings deepen our understanding of these ancient people. The author explains that the "Sacred Fire" symbolizes longevity and hope, and it must be kept burning so that the Indian People can remember the ways of their ancestors. There are many lessons within these pages for us all to consider.



FOR OLDER READERS

*Gantos, Jack. *Jack's Black Book*. (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997, \$16.00, ISBN 0-374-3366208)

Seventh-grader Jack Henry decides that he is going to become a writer in this third collection of stories about him. While he is looking for an idea to strike him, he flunks an IQ test at school, has a tattoo put on his big toe, nearly fails wood shop and seventh grade, builds a coffin for his dead dog, buries the dog, and digs him up. Hopefully, he's not your typical seventh-grader. He does keep trying. Teen readers should enjoy his latest misadventures.

*Houston, Gloria. *Bright Freedom's Song: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. Silver Whistle/Harcourt Brace, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-15-201812-3)

Building on her heritage as a child of the South Appalachian Mountains, the author crafts a story in which people who had escaped the bondage of indentureship and homesteaded in the mountains where she lived, played a role in the operation of the Underground Railroad. As they treasured their freedom, opposing slavery and aiding escaping slaves became the only possible ethical choice for these people. Her story centers around one courageous 14-year-old girl's fight to help escaped slaves on their way north. Bright is the daughter of an escaped servant, and when he falls ill, it is up to her to transport the "bundles" to safety. It is an inspiring story, with lots of food for thought.

Kerr, M.E. *Blood on the Forehead: What I Know About Writing*. (HarperTrophy, 1998, \$12.95, ISBN 0-06-446207-2).

In this collection, a celebrated author for young adults shares the stories behind and excerpts from several of her novels and short stories. As she does so, she offers up many sensible writing tips for young people who might aspire to write fiction. It is an especially insightful look into the ways she gets her ideas and how they are transformed into her fictional writing.

*Korman, Gordon. *The Chicken Doesn't Skate*. (Scholastic, 1996, \$14.95, ISBN 0-590-85300-7)

Inspired by a school visit in Michigan, the author writes a hilarious story of a losing hockey team that adopts a chicken as its mascot and suddenly starts to win games. Unfortunately, the chicken is the subject of a science fair project and is destined to be served to the judges as the final link in a food chain display. Told from the perspectives of one of the hockey players, an animal rights activist, an aspiring playwright, and the budding scientist who planned the exhibit, this story will make you laugh and cheer at Henrietta the Chicken's escapades.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-374-33265-7)

Stanley Yelnats' family has a history of bad luck. The latest happening is when Stanley is sent to a juvenile detention camp in the

middle of a desert for a crime he did not commit. Here he is forced to dig a huge hole each day, with the promise of a day off if he "finds something interesting." The warden claims this job is designed to build character, but it soon becomes apparent that there must be

another reason for the task. The book is a complex, humorous, yet serious tale that takes many paths. Once I started, I couldn't put it down. Surely, this will be one of the Newbery finalists, if not the grand prize winner. We will have to keep an eye out to see what happens.

FOR THE SEASON OF WINTER

Cuyler, Margery. *The Biggest, Best Snowman*. Illustrations by Will Hillenbrand. (Scholastic, 1998, \$15.95, ISBN 0-590-13922-3)

A little girl lives with her BIG mother, and BIG sisters, who always tell her she is too small to do anything. When her animal friends want her to make a snowman, she thinks she is too small to do it. They encourage her to try, and then they help her to accomplish the task. Her mother and sisters are surprised and decide she is big enough to help them with their various projects, starting with making a BIG yummy lunch. Little people will love this book.

Diviny, Sean. *Snow Inside the House*. Illustrations by Joe Rocco. (HarperCollins, 1998, \$14.95, ISBN 0-06-027354-2)

A young child imagines what it would be like if it snowed inside the house instead of outside. You could ski in the halls, keep a penguin for a pet, build an igloo in the attic, and do many other wild things, although being warm and cozy in your own bed does have its good points. It would be fun to let children create their own "What if?" variations of this funny book.

Gershator, Phillis. *When It Starts to Snow*. Illustrations by Martin Matje. (Henry Holt, 1998, \$15.95, ISBN 0-8050-5404-9)

"What do you do, and where do you go if it starts to snow?" is the subject of this picture book. Various animals tell a little boy their answers as snow starts to fall from the sky. They scurry to find shelter to escape for the winter, while the little boy is so excited that he has three cheers for winter as he heads out to play.

Shulevitz, Uri. *Snow*. (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998, \$16.00, ISBN 0-374-37092-3)

A little boy and his dog celebrate the first big snowfall of the season. When the first flakes fall, nobody thinks the snow will amount to anything. However, the little boy believes, and soon he dances though a city of white.