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Book-Pourri

BY VERA E. MILZ



A new school year, new students, a new column—a time of beginnings! I am excited about this new section of the journal which will be devoted to reviews of books for readers of all ages. Each of the books in this column is one that I have enjoyed and treasured, but I hope to hear from you as I put together future columns. If you have a favorite book that has met a special need in your classroom, or one that you can recommend to others, please share it with me for a future column. Send your reviews to: 1750 Woodgate Dr., Troy, MI 48083.

FOR YOUNG READERS

Aylesworth, Jim. *Old Black Fly*. Illustrations by Stephen Gammell. (Holt, 1992, \$15.95, ISBN 0-8050-1401-2).

Nothing can drive you crazier than being chased by a pesky fly, and the fly in this unique book is one of the worst. For example, he “coughed on the cookies with the chocolate bits, and drove the dog nearly out of his wits.” Children will be chanting “Shoo fly! Shoo fly! Shooo” until the fly and the book come to a satisfying end.

Ehlert, Lois. *Circus*. (HarperCollins, 1992, \$14.89, ISBN 0-06020253-X).

A wonder bear on a high wire, fearless leaping lizards, marching snakes, and flying zucchinis are but a few of the acts in this brilliantly illustrated circus. Children are sure to love a visit to this unusual book. It is truly a visual delight!

Meddaugh, Susan. *Martha Speaks*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1992, \$13.95, ISBN 0-395-63313-3).

Martha is an ordinary dog until she eats some alphabet soup. The letters in the soup go up to her brain instead of down to her stomach, so now she can talk. At first, it's great fun, but big problems develop when Martha says exactly what is on her mind and won't shut up until her family tells her off! Martha stops eating alphabet soup and then stops talking. However, when a burglar breaks into the house—Martha is able to save the day. This is a hilarious story with just enough crazy logic to allow readers to predict how it will end.

INFORMATIONAL BOOKS

Arnosky, Jim. *Crinkleroot's Guide to Knowing the Birds*. (Bradbury Press, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN 0-02-705857-3).

Using a fictional character named Crinkleroot, Arnosky packs this book with lots of information to allow young nature lovers to learn about birds. Starting with advice on keeping quiet and how to use binoculars, he then points out places to look, how to listen, and facts about birds. Last, he suggests ways to attract birds to your area and encourages readers to keep a record of what they see. His own list serves as an index for the entire book. This is the fifth of the delightful Crinkleroot nature books.

Cherry, Lynne. *A River Ran Wild*. (Gulliver Green/Harcourt, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN 0-15-200542-0).

This book traces the history of the Nashua River over the past six centuries. Indian people settled along its banks until they were joined by English settlers in the 1600s. Mills and factories were built and allowed to dump chemicals, dyes and wastes into the river until it was declared ecologically dead in the 1960s. In 1962, Marion Stoddart organized the community to save the river and stop the factories from dumping. Slowly, the current began to clean the water, and today it flows freely to the ocean. This beautifully illustrated history will inspire readers to value our natural resources, and to consider what can be done to restore those which have not received the care they deserve. For a free curriculum guide with many educational activities, just call HBJ Customer Service at 1-800-543-1918.

Cummings, Pat, Compiler/Editor. *Talking with Artists*. (Bradbury, 1992, \$18.95. ISBN 0-02-724245-5).

Illustrated by the various artists. Fourteen well-known children's book illustrators, such as Lois Ehlert, Chris Van Allsburg, and Jerry Pinkney, answer questions about their lives and work. Each piece begins with an autobiographical essay complete with an early photograph and a piece of early artistic attempts. The questions asked of each artist are the same—thus, inviting comparison and contrast by your students. A glossary of art and publishing terms is also very helpful. This is a stunning book bound to inspire budding young artists, as well as encourage others to find more enjoyment in the beautiful illustrations in children's books.

Freedman, Russell. *An Indian Winter*. (Holiday House, 1992, \$21.95,

ISBN 0-8234-0930-9).

Paintings and drawings by Karl Bodmer. In 1833, Prince Maximilian, a German prince, and Karl Bodmer, a Swiss painter, traveled up the Missouri River into the heart of Indian country. Maximilian kept a detailed journal, and Bodmer painted dozens of portraits, landscapes, and sketches of everyday life. Freedman has taken this unique record to tell the story of the two men and the Native Americans, the Mandan and Hidatsas Indians, who befriended them. The two men spent the entire winter on the plains of what is today North Dakota. By 1870, smallpox epidemics and loss of land to the white man destroyed the Indians, and all that remained was the record of the two travelers. Freedman has created a stunning look at a lost culture—a part of America's history.

Simon, Seymour. *Snakes*. (HarperCollins, 1992, \$15.89, ISBN 0-06022530-0).

Large full-color photographs accompany a clear, succinct text which shows how snakes exist in the natural world. Few people like snakes, and most hate them—yet Simon clearly shows that they have an important role to play in the balance of nature. He states that if all snakes were to disappear, the earth would be overrun with rats and rodents which would destroy crops and carry disease. They will never be my favorite creature, but after reading this book, I must say my understanding and respect for these animals has greatly increased!

COLUMBUS QUINCENTENNIAL

Dyson, John. *Westward with Columbus*. (Scholastic/Madison Press, 1991, \$15.95, ISBN 0-590-43846-8).

Photographs by Peter Christopher. Using a replica of the Nina, John Dyson

and a crew of Spanish students recreate the journey of Columbus's ships in 1492. Writing from the viewpoint of Pedro, a young boy on the original Santa Maria, Dyson helps readers to travel back in time to reconsider these historical events.

Fritz, Jean, Katherine Paterson, Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, Margaret Mahy and Jamake Highwater. *The World in 1492*. (Holt, 1992, \$19.95. ISBN 0-8050-1674-0). Illustrations by Stefano Vitale.

Chapters on Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and Oceania, and the Americas have been written by six outstanding authors known for their careful research and fine literature for children. This is not a Columbus-bashing book, but instead it carefully shows that in 1492 there were sophisticated civilizations throughout the world which have made far-reaching contributions to all our lives.

Sis, Peter. *Follow the Dream: The Story of Christopher Columbus*. (Knopf, 1991, \$15.00, ISBN 0-679-80628-8).

This is a beautifully illustrated text inspired by Sis's own immigration to the United States in 1982. The voyage is presented with minimal text making it especially useful with younger children.

Yolen, Jane. *Encounter*. (Harcourt, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN 0-15-225962-7). Illustrations by David Shannon.

Using historical records and her own imagination, Yolen weaves the story of the encounter of Columbus with the Taino people on San Salvador. Instead of using Columbus's point of view, she writes from that of a Taino boy who might have been present at that historic meeting.

FOLKTALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Kimmel, Eric A. *The Four Gallant*

Sisters, adapted from the Brothers Grimm. (Holt, 1992, \$15.95, ISBN 0-8050-1901-4). Illustrations by Tatyana Yuditskaya.

Kimmel has reshaped two Grimm stories to tell a tale of four orphaned girls who are intelligent, insightful, and wise. The girls disguise themselves as men so as to go out into the world to learn a trade. After they are trained, they go into the service of a young king where they rescue his promised bride—a beautiful princess—and her four brothers from a terrible dragon. They reveal themselves as women when the four princes reveal their respect and love for them.

Lattimore, Deborah Nourse. *The Winged Cat: A Tale of Ancient Egypt*. (HarperCollins, 1992, \$14.89, ISBN 0-06-023636-1).

In this original tale, Lattimore brings the art and culture of ancient Egypt to life, as she tells the story of Merit, a young girl who serves in the temple of the cat goddess. When a sacred cat is killed, Merit accuses the High Priest of the killing. He denies the deed, and both must travel through the Netherworld to be judged by the gods. Merit's courage and the powerful magic of being a reader are just part of this dramatic and fascinating story.

Martin, Rafe. *The Rough-Face Girl*. (Putnam, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN 0-399-21859-9). Illustrations by David Shannon.

In this Algonquian Cinderella tale, the youngest sister is treated cruelly by her two sisters, and her face is scarred by the fire she must tend. However, it is only she who can see the wonders of the natural world, and this allows her to win the heart of the powerful Invisible Being. Another re-telling of this ancient tale is called *Little Firefly*, which is written by

Terri Cohlene, and illustrated by Charles Reasoner (Watermill Press, 1990, \$3.95, ISBN 0-8167-2363-X).

This book also has a section in the back which has photographs and information about the Algonquian people.

San Souci, Robert D. *Sukey and the Mermaid*. (Four Winds, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN 0-02-778141-0). Illustrations by Brian Pinkney.

Set on a little island off the coast of South Carolina, this is the story of a girl who finds life difficult with a new step-pa. She runs off to her secret hiding place, where she unwittingly calls up Mama Jo, a black mermaid. Her life is changed by the mermaid's magic, but ultimately she must depend on her own kindness and love to help others.

POETRY

Bryan, Ashley. *Sing to the Sun*. (HarperCollins, 1992, \$15.00, ISBN 0-06020829-5).

This is a gentle book to savor while celebrating the family, life and spirit of this talented man. A hurricane, saying goodbye, being an artist, looking at a painting, and ancestry are just a few of the topics written about. It is an unusual and tender blending of poetry and art which is bound to touch all who read it.

Goldstein, Bobbye S. *Inner Chimes: Poems on Poetry*. (Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN 1-56397-040-6). Illustrations by Jane Breskin Zalben.

This unique collection is an anthology of poems about poetry. Goldstein has selected poems that will inspire you to introduce your students to even more of the magic of poetry and encourage them to write some of their own.

Livingston, Myra Cohn. *Let Freedom Ring: A Ballad of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Holiday House, 1992, \$14.95, ISBN

0-8234-0957-0). Illustrations by Samuel Byrd.

Drawing upon quotes from Dr. King's speeches and sermons, Livingston adds words to create a ballad which tells of his life and untimely death. The ballad captures King's vision that we must work to create a world where people of all colors can live together in peace.

FOR OLDER STUDENTS

Cooney, Caroline B. *Flight #116 is Down*. (Scholastic, 1992, \$13.95, ISBN 0-590-44465-4).

This is a gripping novel detailing the feelings and actions of a teenager whose life is shaken by the crash of a 747 in her back yard. How her life intersects with area residents who form a rescue team and the crash victims is a riveting and unforgettable story.

Ho, Minfong. *The Clay Marble*. (Farrar, 1991, \$13.95, ISBN 0374-31340-7). Forced to become refugees, twelve-year-old Dara and her family flee to the Cambodian border where they settle in a camp and make friends. Life seems good but the war intrudes again, and Dara must find the courage to survive and help her family rebuild their lives. This is a moving story which is a celebration of the human spirit over much adversity.

Tomey, Ingrid. *Grandfather's Day*. (Boyd's Mills, 1992, \$12.95, ISBN 1-56397-022-8).

This West Bloomfield, Michigan author has created a story of a young girl who helps her grandfather return to the world after the recent loss of his beloved wife. When Grandpa moves into the house, Raydeen is upset as she is uprooted from her bedroom, and also must learn to understand the sad, withdrawn man who has entered her life. The task isn't easy, but her love and determination

ultimately help her to succeed.

Whelan, Gloria. *Goodbye, Vietnam*. (Knopf, 1992, \$13.00, ISBN 0-679-82263-1).

This is an up-lifting story detailing the travels of a Vietnamese family who must flee their beloved country. They undertake an arduous journey beginning on foot and continuing by sea on a tiny fishing boat. When they reach Hong Kong, they face a crowded refugee camp and the fear that they will be returned to Vietnam. This northern Michigan resident has created a sensitive and timely novel which captures the feelings and struggle of these courageous people.

PROFESSIONAL BOOKS

Benedict, Susan and Lenore Carlisle, Eds. *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers*. (Heinemann Educational Books, 1992, \$16.00, ISBN 0-435-08710-X).

As a primary teacher, I have long been convinced of the power of picture books. This book celebrates the value of using these books far beyond the primary grades. Teachers in upper grade and high school settings share their uses of picture books, and authors Georgia Heard, Ann Turner, and Bijou Le Tord provide a glimpse of their creative processing, and of how their works can be used with older students.

DeFord, Diane E., Carol A. Lyons, and Gay Su Pinnell, Eds. *Bridges to Literacy: Learning from Reading Recovery*. (Heinemann Educational Books, 1991, \$17.50, ISBN 0-435-08575-1).

The three editors/authors have worked with New Zealand's Reading Recovery (RR) program as it was implemented in the Columbus, Ohio area. In this book, they explain the program and show how many techniques and materials used in RR can be used by teachers to

create exciting classrooms. This ought to be a very helpful book for the many districts in Michigan attempting to implement the program with students.

FOR ADULT PLEASURE READING

Crichton, Michael. *Rising Sun*. (Knopf, 1992, \$22.00, ISBN 0394-58942-4).

This story of two detectives trying to discover who killed a beautiful model in the boardroom of a Japanese corporation's new Los Angeles building is a page-turning mystery that you will find hard to put down. One of the detectives speaks fluent Japanese and is constantly informing his partner of Japanese trade practices and character, thus making the book also a comparison of how business is transacted between the United States and Japan. Whether you agree or not with the trading practices, there is a lot to think about as you read this well-crafted book.

McMillan, Terry. *Waiting to Exhale*. (Viking, 1992, \$22.00, ISBN 0-670-83980-9).

This is a witty and, I believe, truthful story of four black women in their mid-thirties. Three are close friends who live in Phoenix, and the fourth—Savannah Jackson—moves there from Denver in her search to avoid a deep-seated loneliness. Bernadine Harris has just been dumped by her husband of eleven years, Robin Stokes is coming off a dead-end love affair, and Gloria Matthews is a single mother of a teenager fighting to survive economically as the owner of a hair salon. While each hopes for that man who will take her breath away, they provide a firm support for each other. They are not complainers, but strong independent survivors—women of the 90s. 