In This Issue

- J.R.R. Tolkien—books about him
- Series books for middlers
- Great adventure fiction
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Dear Readers,

I have been encouraged seeing the re-issue of Christian classics from all periods of history, some edited into modern English. Christian sages over the centuries have much to say to us about following Christ. In this issue you will meet with three heroes, all noted for their faith, and all known world-wide. Check them out in adult nonfiction. Next issue we’ll take a look at some others.

As we move forward with CLJ, we continue to survey books in various subject areas, looking for the best to recommend to our readers. Eventually this will be come a recommended core list for the Christian school library, K-12, and all Christian families. As you search for books in various subject areas to add to your library (or to check out from your local library), check out the CLJ Library Catalog, available here online. If we have added titles in that subject area, you’ll find them there as they are chosen.

We are also gradually returning to our original calling, that of encouraging librarians, teachers, and parents as they share books with young people. You’ll see less adult nonfiction titles, and more titles for young people. Many other sources, including those published by Christianity today, deal with adult nonfiction titles, so check those out.

May the Lord bless you and your reading!

In Christ’s love,

Nancy L. Hesch
Editor and Publisher
The purpose of the *Christian Library Journal* is to provide readers with reviews, from a Christian point of view, of both Christian and secular titles for the Christian reader. Materials reviewed may reflect a broad range of Christian doctrinal positions and do not necessarily reflect the views of *Christian Library Journal*.

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J. R. R. Tolkien, and His Tales of Middle-Earth
Part 2
by Donna W. Bowling

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, in several polls at the end of the Twentieth Century, was named “author of the century,” as noted in Part 1 of this article (CLJ Sept. 2007). While that part of the article dealt with the stories written by J.R.R. Tolkien, this article deals with books about the scholar and author.

Some of these titles that are designed for the general reader may be particularly useful to Christian school English teachers and librarians—and to some of those high school students that delight in knowing more about certain subjects than their teachers do. Authors writing about J.R.R. Tolkien and his works draw from many sources.

Among the works by Tolkien himself referred to repeatedly are: The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings, The Silmarillion, his Letters, “On Fairy Stories,” “The Quest of Erebor” from Unfinished Tales, and “Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth” from The History of Middle Earth, vol. 10, Morgoth’s Ring.


PAP 1587430851, 9781587430855, OP; buy used 823/.912 234 p. ; 23 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 5

In Following Gandalf: Epic Battles and Moral Victory in The Lord of the Rings, author Matthew Dickerson examines battles on the spiritual plane and on the physical plane. Because moral victory is ultimately much more important than military victory, moral victory actually contributes to military victory. Greatest among the wise, Gandalf, agent of the One as an enemy of Sauron, exercises his stewardship by encouraging and guiding the peoples of Middle-earth to Sauron’s defeat. Comparing and contrasting the responses of various characters in different contexts, Dickerson illustrates the significance of individual choices and the moral responsibility that accompanies free will. Sauron created his Ring to give him power to dominate wills, and one of his major weapons is despair. While despair leads to slavery, hope brings freedom. Good and evil are not relative, but mercy leaves open the possibility of redemption for individuals who have committed evil acts. Through the ages, the hidden hand of the One has used free choices of individuals to finally defeat the evil power of Sauron.

Professor Matthew Dickerson of Middlebury College in Vermont has written and lectured on Tolkien. He co-authored From Homer to Harry Potter with David O’Hara. In this book, Dickerson sheds light on major characters and events in The Lord of the Rings by referring frequently to other writings by Tolkien and others—including the Bible. Tolkien incorporated elements of the mythologies of northern Europe in his work, but he wrote from a Christian worldview. Although Tolkien’s “legendarium” (as he called his “pre-Christian” Middle-earth corpus) contains no Incarnate Christ, its clear illustration of the importance of individual choices in the very real warfare between good and evil has much value for Christians. Dickerson’s book is highly recommended for public, church, and Christian school libraries, and families interested in Tolkien’s works.


PAP 0664226108, 9780664226107, $16.95 823/9 xi, 169 p. ; 22 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 4
Author Ralph Wood intends The Gospel According to Tolkien as a “theological meditation on The Lord of the Rings,” showing its Christian dimension. Although the stories of Middle-earth take place before the appearance of an incarnate Christ, they contain much biblical truth. The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings only hint at the hand of the One, but The Silmarillion leaves no doubt. In Wood’s first chapter, the Creator sings the universe into being, creating various levels of beings, each with special qualities. The second chapter, “The Calamity of Evil,” details the evil effects of rebellion. Sauron’s One Ring, crafted to gain power to dominate, creates division and ultimately destroys itself. The third chapter, “The Counter-Action to Evil,” presents examples of the four classical virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These result in moral growth shown in various characters by self-sacrifice, mercy, endurance, and self-restraint. Chapter four, “The Lasting Corrective,” portrays the way redeeming grace produces faith, hope, and love. These empower friendship, fulfilled prophecy, and the ability to forgive. The fifth chapter, “Consummation: When Middle-earth shall be unmarred,” refers to “The Debate of Finrod and Androth,” which predicts that “the One will himself enter into Arda, and heal Men and all the Marring from the beginning to the end.”

Professor Ralph C. Wood, of Baylor University, has taught on Tolkien in several universities, and has written other books. Drawing from experiences by different characters in Tolkien’s legendarium, Wood suggests various implications from the strengths and weaknesses in the qualities that he emphasizes. Brief citations of references for quotations appear in the text with full bibliographic data at the end of the volume. Lacks index. Individual readers may vary with Wood, but this book is definitely recommended for public and church libraries and others interested in Tolkien’s writings.

Lord of the Rings, to approach eleven fields of philosophy through fifty philosophical questions. Kreeft “presents four tools for understanding each of the philosophical issues The Lord of the Rings treats: a. an explanation of the meaning and importance of the question; b. a key quotation from The Lord of the Rings showing how Tolkien answered the question (many more passages are given in the Concordance to The Lord of the Rings in the Appendix); c. a quotation from Tolkien’s other writings (usually a letter) that explains or comments on the theme in The Lord of the Rings; d. a quotation from C.S. Lewis, Tolkien’s closest friend, showing the same philosophy directly stated.” Beginning with metaphysics (what is real, worldview), he includes epistemology (knowledge and truth), aesthetics (beauty), and ends with three chapters on the practical topic of ethics (good and evil; hard virtues such as duty, obedience, courage, hope, and honesty; and soft virtues such as friendship, humility, gift-giving, mercy, and charity). In the Conclusion, Kreeft suggests that Christ can be seen in various characters, themes, and language in The Lord of the Rings. Bibliography is included.

A delightful speaker with a flair for words, Peter Kreeft is a frequent lecturer on Tolkien or C.S. Lewis. This book could be used to explore the common perspectives of these two distinguished friends. Kreeft is professor of philosophy at Boston College and has written several books. A fun read, this thought provoking book is accessible to the general reader and interested high school students. It is highly recommended for public, church, Christian school and family libraries.


Although Peter Kreeft’s The Philosophy of Tolkien is not a dry textbook, it could be “an engaging introduction” to philosophy. While “Philosophy says truth, literature shows truth” (p. 20). Kreeft employs different situations in The Philosophy of Tolkien to approach eleven fields of philosophy through fifty philosophical questions. Kreeft “presents four tools for understanding each of the philosophical issues The Lord of the Rings treats: a. an explanation of the meaning and importance of the question; b. a key quotation from The Lord of the Rings showing how Tolkien answered the question (many more passages are given in the Concordance to The Lord of the Rings in the Appendix); c. a quotation from Tolkien’s other writings (usually a letter) that explains or comments on the theme in The Lord of the Rings; d. a quotation from C.S. Lewis, Tolkien’s closest friend, showing the same philosophy directly stated.” Beginning with metaphysics (what is real, worldview), he includes epistemology (knowledge and truth), aesthetics (beauty), and ends with three chapters on the practical topic of ethics (good and evil; hard virtues such as duty, obedience, courage, hope, and honesty; and soft virtues such as friendship, humility, gift-giving, mercy, and charity). In the Conclusion, Kreeft suggests that Christ can be seen in various characters, themes, and language in The Lord of the Rings. Bibliography is included.

In Celebrating Middle-earth, John G. West, Jr., has brought together six papers presented at the conference held at Seattle Pacific University [SPU] on November 9-10, 2001. In addition to the well-known authors Peter Kreeft and Joseph Pearce, papers by four faculty members from SPU appear. In his “The Lord of the Rings as a Defense of Western Civilization,” West discusses four themes: natural law—universal moral order, the Fall, freedom—both moral and political, and the transcendent—vs. scientific materialism. Kreeft’s “Wartime Wisdom: Ten Uncommon
Insights about Evil in The Lord of the Rings provides a print version of the cassette recording reviewed in Christian Library Journal in April 2003. Janet Leslie Blumberg, presents four important Anglo-Saxon works that, blended with High Medieval English Literature, are reflected in Tolkien’s writings. Joseph Pearce’s chapter on “True Myth: the Catholicism of The Lord of the Rings” discusses Tolkien the man, Tolkien’s philosophy of myth, and the Christian nature of Tolkien’s myth. In “Theology and Morality in The Lord of the Rings” Kelly L. Dearborn, approaches Tolkien’s “First, his desire to reflect the sacramental nature of reality, second, to smuggle truth into a realm that is hostile to that truth, and third, his desire to be a sub-creator.” In his final short piece “The Lord of the Rings and the Meaning of Life,” Phillip Goggans, suggests that Tolkien’s opus is “a novel about purpose,” defending Middle-earth as a “world of order” where things “have a proper function.”

This title is particularly useful for bringing into print Kreeft’s piece on “Wartime Wisdom.” Contributor Joseph Pearce is a writer and professor at Ava Maria University. Papers from each of the faculty from SPU have insightful observations. This short book is accessible to general readers and is recommended for all libraries with interests in Tolkien’s works.


HBB 1414305966, 9781414305967,$14.99
823/.912 xxiv, 177 p.; 20 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

In Finding God in The Hobbit, Jim Ware presents twenty short devotional meditations arranged in the sequence of events in the story. Each chapter begins with a relevant epigraph quotation from The Hobbit (with the one exception of a quotation from Tolkien’s Letters). An event from the story with commentary, perhaps some reference to other related literature, and applicable Scriptures conclude with a one-sentence challenge “reflection.” Ware begins with Bilbo Baggins as he confronts his internal conflict between his dreams of adventure and his familiar creature comforts. Through Bilbo’s many choices and circumstances of grace, he ultimately sees the hand of providence at work. From Bilbo’s experiences, Ware illustrates such concepts as the love of beauty, the self-destructiveness of evil, the importance of mercy for its own sake, the recognition of the enemy within, and a need to sacrifice personal treasure for the general good. In his Introduction and Afterthoughts, Ware tells how Tolkien’s works and other literature have fostered in him a deeper Christian appreciation and commitment.

Jim Ware is the author of several books, including Finding God in The Lord of the Rings and Finding God in the Land of Narnia, which he co-authored Kurt Bruner, who contributes the foreword to this title. As Ware relates incidents from Bilbo’s adventure, his own style is sometimes more exuberant than Tolkien’s. In addition to The Hobbit, he occasionally draws on information from Tolkien’s “The quest of Erebor” (published posthumously in Unfinished Tales and later in edited format in The Annotated Hobbit) and additional titles by Tolkien and others. Endnotes and bibliography appear at the end of the volume. Intended for the general reader, this book is accessible to high school students or particularly interested younger students. This title is definitely recommended for church and Christian school libraries and interested families.


PAP 1414301316, 9781414301310,$9.99
823/.912 xxii, 194 p.; 21 cm.
HS (MS) Rating: 3

Author Sarah Arthur offers twenty-two short devotional challenges for young adults in her Walking with Bilbo. Beginning each chapter with an epigraph from The Hobbit, Arthur applies a circumstance in Bilbo’s story to an everyday situation that a young person might face in life. She frequently illustrates how Bilbo’s actions have an impact on future events in The Lord of the Rings. Among others, her topics include: being chosen, accepting responsibility, feeling forsaken, the danger of departing from the truth, getting along with others, and a final home. A short Scripture passage at the end of each meditation is followed by a series of personal “going further” questions and several longer Bible references for additional study. A “quick reference guide” at the end of the book is “a glossary of terms related to The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.”

Sarah Arthur’s years as a youth director have informed her writing for young adults. She employs her lively style for meaningful practical applications. Her Walking with Frodo and Walking through the Wardrobe have been reviewed in Christian Library Journal. The endnotes include further titles by Tolkien and others. Although targeted specifically to youth, this book has much to offer adults as well. It is
recommended for church and Christian school libraries and interested families.


PAP 1587420198, 9781587420191, $17.95
823/.912 250 p.; 24 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Michael Perry has aptly named the subtitle for Untangling Tolkien: a Chronology and Commentary for The Lord of the Rings. For his chronology, Perry has chosen not to use the common calendar Third Age dates found in Tolkien's Appendix B to The Return of the King. Instead, he adopts the Shire Reckoning calendar found in Appendix D as being more appropriate to a story from the perspective of hobbits. (Since the Shire was founded in T.A. 1601, adding 1600 to Shire Reckoning dates yields the corresponding Third Age dates as found in Tolkien's chronology in Appendix B.) In his introductory chapters Perry discusses details about Tolkien's various calendars and his care with dating. Using other Tolkien titles in addition to The Lord of the Rings, Perry offers his chronology of the events of the story, specifying for each date the actions of each of the significant characters, whether separated or together. Parallel sidebars provide reference sources for each assigned dating. When necessary, Perry indicates if dates are calculated, estimated, or approximate. In addition to frequent comments about the significance of certain events in the story, Perry occasionally inserts more extensive commentary on relevant topics that reflect Tolkien's worldview. Occasional diagrams or charts showing movements of characters, or genealogical tables are interspersed. “A Quick Reference to Important Dates,” arranged alphabetically by personal name or significant event, appears on the last page.

Michael W. (Wiley) Perry is editor of Inkling Books in Seattle and has recently edited several titles by G. K. Chesterton. Perry intends this unique title as a supplement to Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, not as a replacement for it. Geared to the general reader, and accessible to interested high school students, this relatively inexpensive reference title is definitely recommended for libraries with an interest in Tolkien's works.


PAP 1587680262, 9781587680267, $18.00
820.9/00912 xii, 244 p.; 23 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Combining elements of biography and literary study, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship, by Colin Duriez is much more than either. Duriez explores the way the long interpersonal relationship between these two major Christian scholars and writers of the mid-twentieth century affected their lives and is reflected in their literary works. Chapters are arranged roughly in chronological order, from Tolkien's birth in 1892 to his death in 1973, with some overlap during the 1930s to deal with differing topics. Each chapter begins with a brief imaginary reconstruction (based on sources cited in the endnotes) of a significant event involving one or both of the subjects. A final chapter, “The Gift of Friendship,” points out the affinities in perspective that sustained their friendship through its ups and downs over nearly forty years. Tolkien was influential in Lewis's conversion to Christianity, and the men shared scholarly, as well as imaginative, interests, including the values they advocated for myth and story. Tolkien's effect on Lewis's thinking is seen in the latter's writings; Lewis's encouragement for Tolkien contributed to bringing his writings to publication. Appendix B suggests several reasons for the enduring popularity of these two major writers. A brief chronology of the lives of the two authors, bibliographies, endnotes, and an index are included.

For years author Colin Duriez was general books editor for Inter-Varsity Press in England. Among his several books, two reviewed by Christian Library Journal are The C.S. Lewis Encyclopedia and A Field Guide to Narnia. His extensive research into the writings of and about these authors provides this very readable book with many more significant insights than space here affords. Easily accessible to the general reader and interested high school students, this title is recommended for public, church, and Christian school libraries, as well as interested families.


PAP 1587680173, 9781587680175, $17.00
823/.912 xvii, 296 p.; 20 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

While not as comprehensive in the number of their Middle-earth entries as either Foster or Tyler (see below), this title would meet most needs, with the added benefit of Duriez's Christian insight, particularly in chapter seven. Several entry topics in chapter seven are even absent in the much more extensive and expensive *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* edited by Michael Drout. A minor error in the chronology on pages 38 and 39 is obviously inaccurate month names. This title is definitely recommended for church and Christian school libraries and families with an interest in Tolkien's works.


HBB 0345465290, 9780345465290, OP; buy used
PAP 0345449762, 9780345449764, $16.00
823/.912 xvi, 569 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

In *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, Robert Foster undertakes to include in one alphabetical arrangement entries for every character, every place, and every thing that is named in *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*, with several entries from *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. Each entry includes a brief summary of significant information about the named subject, followed by abbreviated references to pages in Tolkien's works that support Foster’s description. Entries for personal names and chronological periods include date spans where available. Some entries are short, up to a dozen on one page, while others are longer, up to three pages in length. Where appropriate, cross-references appear. Appendices include "A Chronology of the First Age," and "Genealogical Tables."

Professor Robert Alfred Foster (1949- ) most recently taught at Rutgers University. Foster's work has sometimes been compared with J.E.A. Tyler's 715-page title, *The Complete Tolkien Companion*, published in 2004. Tyler's work includes some entries for names in works more recently published posthumously by Christopher Tolkien, such as *Unfinished Tales* and some volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*. Although Tyler's work includes a number of entries that are not in Foster's work, the reverse is also true. While Foster's entries are basically matter-of-fact in nature, some of Tyler's entries seem more speculatively subjective. Since Tyler's entries do not include supporting references to Tolkien's works (a few endnotes appear at the end of each alphabet section), verifying or finding further information on those subjects is more difficult. Because both Foster's reference work and Tyler's work have some information not included in the other, neither is entirely redundant. However, Foster's work is specifically recommended by widely recognized authorities. Because of its special strengths, it is highly recommended for public libraries and Christian schools and families with an interest in Tolkien's works.


HBB 9518642676, 9780618642670, $30.00
823/.912 lxxxi, 894 p. ; 23 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

In *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, the authors supplement, but do not replace the 12-volume *The History of Middle-Earth*, edited by Christopher Tolkien. The prefatory matter includes some history of Tolkien's work, with information on chronologies, calendars, maps, and details on decisions about the physical volumes. This *Companion* title includes many fragmentary quotations (with commentary) from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* itself, in order as they appear in his text, chapter by chapter. At the head of each chapter, the authors refer to additional works, such as the history edited by Christopher Tolkien. This book is designed as a reference to be placed beside Tolkien's major work as the reader is reading it, not
to be read independently.

Recognized scholars Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull are the authors of other books on Tolkien, including *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator* and their major 2-volume *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion & Guide*. A frontispiece plate before the half-title page has Tolkien's color illustration of Hobbiton, with Bag End in the distance, and on its verso, a copy of a one-page fragment from a chronological chart Tolkien prepared showing activities of different major characters. Extracts from a letter by Tolkien to his publisher in 1951, his short piece on “Nomenclature of *The Lord of the Rings*,” and some changes to certain editions, appear near the end of the book, before the list of works consulted and a 60-page index. Although possibly of less interest to casual readers, this informative, well-bound, and relatively inexpensive book could appeal to well-informed fans of Tolkien’s work, and it is definitely recommended for that audience.

References:


Review Rating System

*5 Outstanding—a beautifully written book which impacts
5 Excellent—well written, among the very best
4 Good—definitely worth reading
3 Fair—to be read for relaxation or to meet needs for information
2 Poor—poor writing or editing; read only if very interested
1 —What can we say? Not much going for this title.

Recommended with caution (may be used with any of the above ratings)—Note reservations within the review.

Not recommended (may be used with any of the above ratings)—Note problems within the review.

With fiction, the rating includes the quality of plot development/pacing, characterization, sense of time and place, mood and atmosphere, dialogue, depth of perception, sensitivity of writing, use of humor. Be aware that some books are character driven, so character development is extremely important. Others are plot driven, so character development isn’t as critical; plot is.

Commonly used abbreviations in CLJ reviews

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A couple of boys have the best week ever / Marla Frazee. LCCN 2006025781. Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2008.

HBB 0152060200, 9780152060206, $16.00
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

Beach or mountains? Active or lazy? What is a perfect summer vacation? James and Eamon in Marla Franzee’s *A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever* experience the best kid-kind: plenty of unstructured time with indulgent grandparents, Pam and Bill. The sugar content of the food is high and Nature Camp is just a place to go for the day. The early elementary boys enjoy time being, just being. The last night together, they prepare a special and thoughtful surprise for Pam and Bill, a surprise two normal kids would think up and carry off.

The back story on this book for early elementary is that after her boys visited her parents, the author drew a little “thank you” booklet to send them. Out of that grew a story where the things the boys say and the way the grandparents respond are completely natural because that is how things really happened. Mostly.

The simple cartoon style drawings interweave on each page with the descriptive text. The text type face resembles hand printing, very much as Franzee’s thank you booklet would have appeared. There is humor and action in the pictures that adds energy and enjoyment to the reading experience. This interplay of words and pictures won this book a 2009 Caldecott Honor Award.

Franzee has captured a week with both adult and kid appeal. Adults will catch the sly humor of the interaction of kids and grandparents. The boys experience just what most adults think happens when the grandparents are in charge! The kids who hear this story will recognize a “best week ever” when they see it!

Robin Currie


HBB 0618965068, 9780618965069, $16.00
E 32 p. : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PS (PRI) Rating: 3

Chuck’s Band, written and illustrated by Peggy Perry Anderson, presents a different take on the Old MacDonald theme of introducing farm animals to children. Farmer Chuck’s animals not only moo, cluck, and bray, these animals can pluck, fiddle, and play all kinds of instruments. That is except Fat Cat Pat. Children interested in both the whimsical and realistic should be entertained by farmer Chuck and his band of musical animals.

The bright acrylic, crayon-like drawings are fun in their simple and appealing format. The text, however, does not flow as well as it could, and the rhyme scheme is a bit forced in spots. Mixing the rhyme in with onomatopoeia had the possibilities of a bouncy, frolicking read, yet just has the meter begins to roll along it hits a flat spot. The surprise ending is enough of a twist to produce a smile and even a laugh. *Chuck’s Band* is a fine introduction to farm animals and even to instruments, but does not invite a repeat reading out loud.

Pam Webb


HBB 0618889337, 9780618889334, $17.00
E or Fic 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 25 x 28 cm.
PRI (INT) Rating: 3

Allen Say tells of the journey and love story of a young girl named Erika who grows up and moves to Tokyo, Japan. As a young girl, Erika is mesmerized by a picture of a small, lighted cottage in Japan that hangs at her grandmother’s house. She studies Japanese in high school and college. As soon as she graduates, she moves to Tokyo to begin a teaching job. However, when she arrives, Japan looks nothing like the quiet, serene picture. Erika says, “This isn’t a city... it’s a hundred cities all crammed together!” She decides to take a teaching job in a smaller area. However, there is still a crowd of people. One more time, she calls her teaching agency and takes a job on a remote island of Japan. Finally, she is satisfied with the scenery and people. Erika takes lessons at a teahouse on how to conduct a tea ceremony. She invites Akira to the ceremony. They marry and remain on the island.

Caldecott Medalist Say captures the culture of Japan through his beautiful, full-page watercolor pictures. Rice paddies, thatched-roof houses, a festival, the bullet train, and teahouse
are some of the jewels presented. Say sprinkles some Japanese words throughout the text for more of a cultural flair. This story seems better aimed at older children, and even adults will enjoy the romantic ending. Teachers or homeschoolers can read this book to whet their appetite for Japanese culture.

*Tina M. Cho*


HBB 0802853390, 9780802853394, $17.50

E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.

PRI (All ages) Rating: 5

Not the typical picture book by any means, *Garmann's Summer*, originally published in Norway, offers a unique exploration of fear from a child's perspective. Garmann, who is six, is worried that none of his teeth are loose. The neighbor girls who are his age have already lost their front teeth and can do all the things he is afraid to: ride a bike, walk tightrope on the fence, and hold their heads under water. Garmann’s biggest fear, however, is starting school. Through a visit by his three ancient aunts during which they share their fears of having to use a walker, of winter with its slippery pavement, and of dying, the story deftly conveys the universal nature of fear. We are all afraid of something. As heavy a topic as that might seem for a picture book, the poetic nature of this story and the wonderful interaction between Garmann and his aunts leaves the reader with a lasting sense of comfort at the shared nature of this emotion.

Stian Hole use of a mixed-media collage of photos, paintings, and old-fashioned dippings works well to capture the reflective nature of the story. What may take some getting used to for readers is the realistic depiction of the three aunts as being very old. Every wrinkle, chin whisker, and age spot is clearly visible; there is nothing sentimental or airbrushed to be found. Children who share Garmann’s fear of starting school will be an obvious audience for this book, but there is something here for everyone at any stage of life. The last line of the book is, “Thirteen hours to go before school starts. And Garmann is scared.” But the reader has a sense that Garmann is no longer overwhelmed by this emotion. He’s prepared and ready to face what lies ahead.

*Lillian Heytvelt*


HBB 0618891951, 9780618891955, $25.00

E 350 p. : col. ill. ; 25 cm.

PRI (PS) Rating: *5

George and Martha are best of friends. And that quite simply is what the *George and Martha: The Complete Stories of Two Best Friends* by James Marshall is all about. All thirty-five stories of these two friends are compiled in this one glorious collection that celebrates both George and Martha and of their creator, James Marshall. In between the seven books are tributes to James Marshall, who is regaled as not only a one of a kind, but as the last of his kind. Marshall was viewed as a delight in terms of illustrator, storyteller, and as friend and person.

There is a deceptive simplicity to the George and Martha stories. Each book has five stories and each story is roughly about four pages of text. The characters are not cute little puppies, kittens, or ducks; they are ponderous hippos. Martha is known for her tulip behind her ear and her somewhat silly approach to life. George sports a gold tooth, a fedora at times, and has an unabashed dedication to Martha. They are friends, and that is what makes these stories work so well. There is no moralizing, no pedantic lessons to be learned, only uncomplicated vignettes showcasing the ups and downs of a good friendship. Marshall, with few lines, four colors, and brief text, created a host of stories that breathed humor, empathy, and consideration of what children and adults (who read the books to the children) like in a story: unpretentiousness. How did he do it? It’s all in the eyes. With two little strokes he could convey more emotion than most trained academy trained artists. And that is the essence of George and Martha—simplicity.

A keeper, for sure.

*Pam Webb*

HBB 0803731078, 9780803731073, $17.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

Star is a small town filled with big dreams. Mae and her cousins are filled with hopeful expectation in 1969, because the spaceship Eagle is soon to land on the moon! The great excitement over this monumental moment seeps into their prayers during church and their imaginations as they play. History is about to change forever.

Amid all of the excitement, May notices that her Grandpa shows little enthusiasm for this great project. She wants to explore his lack of interest as much as she wants to watch the astronauts explore the moon. Apparently, Grandpa’s lifetime of farming have given him different dreams than the rest of the world, and Mae’s love for him draws them together and creates a bond that is memorable for both of them.

The historical facts contained within the book are accurate, and the author shares them in a way that young readers will be able to comprehend. The overall effect of this beautiful book is one of hopefulness and promise. Recommended to anyone with young children in the home as well as to any libraries seeking a solid addition to their picture book collection.

Kim Ford


HBB 0979203597, 9780979203596, $16.95
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
PRI (PS) Rating: 4

Alicia May is a special sister. She loves ladybugs, red fingernail polish, and train sets. She greets her neighbors; brings cheer to her family, friends, and those she meets; and sometimes annoys her big sister Rachel. Alicia May is special through and through. When she was born the doctors had to fix her heart, which is one of the reasons she is so special. Through Rachel’s eyes we see what it might be like to have a sister like Alicia May, and through the gentle text of Nancy Tupper Ling and the vibrant illustrations of Shennen Bersani we read of the love, joy, and acceptance that comes from having a Down syndrome sibling in their picture book, My Sister, Alicia May.

This book is especially of interest for siblings who share both the delights and frustrations of having a special needs brother or sister. They will relate to the overall portrait of the everyday moments that flows in Rachel’s story. Although the text does not openly mention Alicia May having Down syndrome, the illustrations bring forth the different sides of this condition. Both the author and the illustrator bring their direct experiences with having a Down syndrome child in their lives to this project. Their combined effort makes this a notable addition to any collection.

This compassionate story provides a glimpse into the lives of two sisters, both being special in their own way.

Pam Webb

HBB 0545052394, 9780545052399, $16.99
Fic 236 p.; 20 cm.
INT Rating: 4

Amanda and Leo, the best of friends, have spent their entire lives together, always celebrating their birthdays with a joint party. On their 10th birthday they had a falling out and things have not been the same since. Now their 11th has come around and it is just sooo bad. Amanda can’t wait for the day to be over but when she awakes, oh no!, she is reliving her 11th birthday!

How she and Leo discover what is happening and put an end to it, becoming friends again in the bargain, is a delightful and fun story that middle grade students will love.

Through Amanda and Leo, readers will relate to their own trials and tribulations such as peer pressure, especially between boys and girls, loyalty to friends, and the social situations that kids get themselves into. At the same time they will receive some valuable lessons in friendship, kindness, and helpfulness. The writing is fast paced and the read goes quickly.

The title comes not only from the amount of birthdays that Amanda and Leo have had but rather from the amount of times they relive their 11th!

Ceil Carey


PAP 0825431883, 9780825431883, $7.99
Fic 128 p.; 22 cm.


PAP 0825433576, 9780825433573, $7.99
Fic 139 p.; 22 cm.


PAP 0825433657, 9780825433658, $7.99
Fic 140 p.; 22 cm.


PAP 0825434467, 9780825434464, $7.99
Fic 138 p.; 22 cm.

INT MS Rating: 5

An obsession with horses controls twelve-year-old Andrea Carter. This spunky 1880’s tomboy stays embroiled in danger, and keeps the reader turning the pages. These lively stories offer an authentic historical picture of early California, societal strictures, and a glimpse into the harsh facts of life for both Hispanic and Chinese immigrants.

The Long Ride Home introduces us to a headstrong Andrea who refuses to face the consequences of her choice to run away from home. Her beloved horse, Taffy, is lost to a thief who leaves her injured on the road. She is rescued by a poor Mexican family, but pride prevents her return to her family without Taffy. Masquerading as an immigrant worker, she begins a life of hard labor. Andrea feels the sting of prejudice and injustice when she is viewed as an inferior because of her affiliation with her newfound friends.

One escape after another lands Andrea in deep trouble with her harsh schoolmaster in The Dangerous Decision. Although her heart is in the right place, her misplaced attempt at obeying the Golden Rule results in a near-fatal outcome. Her courage and endurance are pushed to the limits as she is taken hostage by a desperate convicted criminal.

Andrea leaps to conclusions as fast as she jumps on the back of her horse Taffy in Andrea Carter and the Family Secret. Compassion leads her to help a mysterious stranger and keep it a secret without foreseeing the repercussions. At home on the ranch more newcomers invade, causing problems at home as well as at school. Empathy with the plight of others leads her to accept responsibility and make sacrifices for others.

Drastic changes are in store for Andrea in The San Francisco Smugglers. Beginning with a flood that makes the school unusable, life turns unpredictable. Andrea’s mother decides this is the perfect opportunity to send her to finishing school in San Francisco. A new friend and bewildering events at school lead Andrea to investigate, intervene, and pitch headlong into peril. Her trust in God’s protection and deliverance are tested to the utmost.
Susan Marlow builds suspense in each book while a gradual maturity unfolds in Andreas's character as she learns from her mistakes. Prayer, repentance, gratitude, forgiveness, and restoration are progressive as she depends upon God in each crisis and grows in her faith. Mrs. Marlow has created an excellent series chock full of adventure, thrills, and information. Some rudimentary Spanish sprinkled throughout the dialog may pique an interest in the language. Saddle up beside Andrea Carter. Long may she ride!

Deborah Rabern


Donavan is a young man with a special talent—he loves words—spelling them, learning their definitions, and using them to win Scrabble games against his grandmother! However, his skills in math leave a lot to be desired. In fact, his parents want to consider hiring a tutor to help bring his grades to an acceptable level. Donavan just wants to be left alone to figure out his troubles, but he doesn't realize that by refusing to face up to his uncomfortable feelings. When he comes face to face with a situation that requires him to help his Uncle Vic, Donavan discovers something that changes the way he approaches the changes in his relationship with his uncle as well as the way he views his struggle with math!

Donavan's Double Trouble is an enjoyable read, and contains valuable lessons about honesty, hard work, determination, and overcoming the discomfort that physical injury can initially cause between even the closest family members. Donavan's family illustrates a terrific and supportive structure in his life, and none of the adults talk down to him just because he is a fourth-grader. It is obvious that Donavan's extended family care a great deal about one another, and Donavan is both encouraged and challenged through the loving support that surrounds him.

Donavan's Double Trouble would make an excellent addition to either a personal or public library. The author places responsibility on Donavan for his progress in school. Her story teaches that there are consequences for being dishonest with one's self and with others.

Kim Ford

HBB 061871720X, 9780618717200, $17.00
599.638 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill.; 24 x 29 cm.

INT (PRI)  Rating: 5
This beautifully illustrated book is based on the true story of Tweega, a very special giraffe in the 1400's and his travels from his native-born Kenya. A giraffe that was such a wondrous animal to the Chinese that he was considered a rare omen of good fortune, seen only once before in the history of China. Chee-lin originates from an animal of Chinese mythology but this chee-lin was real and beautiful and longed to be free.

The author traces the chee-lin's journey from Africa to Bengal to China, the tale of an intriguing beast and the people he meets along the way and always his struggle to be liberated of his bondage.

The book is completed with an author's note that includes, among other things, information on how James Rumford used milk paint to create the lovely illustrations throughout the book.

Ceil Carey


PAP 0764205560, 9780764205569, $14.99
B or 270.092/396 189 p. : ill. ; 26 cm.

INT (PRI, MS) Rating: 4
Heroes in Black History: True Stories from the Lives of Christian Heroes, by Dave and Neta Jackson, presents the lives of fourteen black individuals who toiled to make a significant difference in history. Unique to other black history books, this compilation includes black Christians born in Africa as well as America. Four short sections discuss different times in the lives of each hero. A Bible verse and three study questions encourages groups of any size to dig deeper into how the individual responded in a Christ-like way to difficult situations.

Dave and Neta Jackson draw readers into the heroic lives of people many have not heard about before, in addition to discussing famous persons such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Harriet Tubman. Excited about meeting these new heroes, readers will want to research more information. The Jacksons designed the short sections to serve as a possible devotional. Unfortunately, some of the heroes discussed in this book suffered tremendous hardships and cruel treatment during the days of segregation. These facts have been briefly included.

This book could be used for Black History month or as an adult guided devotional for children.

Mary Vee


HBB 061896634X, 9780618966349, $18.00
591.5/3 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill.; 26 cm.

PRI (PS) Rating: 5
Steve Jenkins and Robin Page have another winner in their non-fiction series of books about nature. This picture book overflows with interesting facts about animals that lay eggs inside another animal, one who grows its own food, a bird that sews its nest together with silk thread and a needle, and a newly hatched animal called a “puggle.”

How Many Ways... is easy to read and for those who want additional information, there are pages in the back with more fascinating facts about the sizes and habitats of birds, fish, mammals, and insects. Readers will learn some of the ways you can “snare a fish,” “hatch an egg,” “use a leaf,” “catch a fly,” “dig a hole,” and “eat a clam.” The authors show that animals and insects are creative and ingenious, each created in unique ways to protect, feed, and nurture their young. For example, a dolphin creates a net of bubbles in which fish get trapped; then the dolphins burst through and have dinner. An assassin bug spears its prey with a sword-like “beak.” Because the white tern doesn't worry about predators, it lays its egg on a tree branch out in the open.

Jenkins’ torn-paper collage illustrations in vivid colors are sure to keep children attentive as they learn about capuchin monkeys who are so intelligent they can be used to help disabled people, and the ichneumon wasp who lays her eggs inside a caterpillar. Young readers won't realize they are learning science because Jenkins and Page make it so much fun as they have with their other creative instructional books.

Floss Craig

HBB 0802795501, 9780802795502, $16.95
8 or 796.42092  1 v. (unpaged): col. ill.; 26 x 27 cm.

INT (PRI) Rating: 5

Jesse Owens: Fastest Man Alive, by Carole Boston Weatherford brings to life Jesse's inspirational struggle to participate in the Olympics. Countrymen have set aside prejudices to participate in Olympic contests every year since its inception, except a few. One such exception involved an African American's entry in the Olympics held in Germany during Adolf Hitler's reign. Despite Hitler's prejudicial response to Owens participation, Owen's determination, stamina, and honest effort earned him not one gold medal, but four.

Weatherford's compelling poetic telling of Jesse's race for gold serves as an example for readers to push forward to be the best they can be in their area of interest. Velasquez's use of soft pastel drawings realistically illustrates Jesse's muscle and strength. Facial expressions in the drawings speak volumes.

We recommend this book especially for Black History month. However, any time an example of fortitude and persistence is needed, this book would make a great choice.

Mary Vee


HBB 0803730586, 9780803730588, $16.99
371.0095491  1 v. (unpaged): col. ill., col. maps ; 24 x 28 cm.

Pri (Int) Rating: 5

This is the story of Greg Mortenson's first building project in Pakistan. Those familiar with Mortenson's Three Cups of Tea will know the account of Dr. Greg and the village of Korphe where the children were without a school. Enter Dr. Greg Mortenson one cold day, hungry and ill. The villagers ministered to his needs and as he grew stronger, he helped the sick in their midst. He also realized that Korphe needed a school and promised to build one. No small task this school, without a bridge to transport materials. But that bridge was built and that school, the first of many built by Mortenson, was erected and dedicated.

This true story is inspiring and written engagingly from the viewpoint of the village children. There is mention of the wise man of the village but no religious connotation to it—this reviewer saw it simply as cultural. The artwork is done in beautiful collages and a Korphe scrapbook of photos finishes off a lovely book that will be thoroughly enjoyed by young readers.

Ceil Carey


HBB 1565076788, 9781565076785, $14.99
395.1/22  32 p.: col. ill.; 23 cm.

INT (PRI) Rating: 5

Are you debating which outfit to wear to a certain function? Perhaps you're concerned which fork or spoon to pick up first? A Little Book of Manners: Courtesy & Kindness for Young Ladies by Emilie Barnes addresses questions regarding proper etiquette that puzzle many adults as well as children. Barnes teaches hints for meeting and greeting manners, telephone manners, playtime and visiting manners, mealtime manners, partytime manners, and thank you manners. Each colorful page provides scenarios appropriate to the specific topic and how one should respond.

Presented from the view of a child learning the manners from an aunt, the text pleasantly discusses each topic without lecturing. Whether guest or hostess, this concise manual provides helps for ladies of all ages from Grandmothers to little ladies attending their first tea party. Readers might find themselves saying, “I didn't know that!” Small portions of this book have white text on purple background; this may be difficult for some readers to see clearly.

We highly recommend this book as a gift or resource for ladies of any age.

Mary Vee


HBB 1590785886,
Marvels in the Muck, by scientist and naturalist Dough Wechsler, provides a solid resource for children curious about or researching the subject salt marshes. Wechsler utilizes simple, expressive language that is easy to understand and clear, color photographs to detail the interactions between plants, birds, insects, amphibians, and other creatures in America’s salt marshes. Readers will discover a wide variety of wildlife in these pages.

The book offers an index, glossary, suggested reading bibliography, and a brief list of web sites for those seeking further information. Regional maps are not included and would have been beneficial.

Wechsler arranges chapters by season, so readers can see marsh life over a calendar year—an effective means of showing symbiosis and life cycles. A few of the creatures and plants discussed are not pictured, making it more challenging to understand them, but the author represents the majority.

He briefly touches upon environmental responsibility, but does not browbeat readers with it. Instead he points out problems, causes, and solutions, weaving them naturally into the text.

This book would appeal to young scientists and plant/animal lovers.

**Jaclyn S. Miller**

*The NIV Adventure Bible* is a Bible that contains the entire New International Version written in easy to understand language for 9-12 year-olds. This number one selling Bible for kids includes many special features, which are certain to strengthen their faith while they read God's Holy Word. Words to Treasure are special verses children are encouraged to memorize, while Did You Know? highlights often tell them things they may not have known about the topic they are reading about. People in Bible Times tells more about certain people in the Bible, while Life in Bible Times teaches children what it was like living in biblical times and places. Special activities in the Live It! boxes help children to apply what they've read to their personal lives, and 20 full-color jungle-themed pages share valuable information such as listing the Ten Commandments, the 12 disciples, famous Old testament prophets, and a page on how to pray.

Each book in the Bible begins with a page that tells who wrote that particular book, why it was written, what time period it was written in, whom it was written for, and important things to learn while reading that particular book in the Bible. Other extras include easy-to-read color maps to help children find Biblical places they are reading about and a dictionary/concordance to explain the meanings of words they may not fully understand.

From its eye-catching hardback cover with the treasure map and compass to all the little extras throughout *The NIV Adventure Bible*, it is easy to see why this kids’ Bible is the most recommended Bible for kids by Christian schools and churches. Its style of writing is true to the original text but is written using easier words that children understand when it is possible without changing the verse's meaning entirely. The extra features are well written and informative, and will be of interest to the children reading them.

There are two small and relatively unimportant drawbacks with *The NIV Adventure Bible*. One would be the paper dustcover that most certainly will be torn simply through use. The information contained on the dustcover perhaps would be better printed on the hardcover Bible itself and the dustcover done away with. A second item would be that the paper used in this Bible, while not as thin as many adult Bibles, could have been a bit heavier since children tend to be rather hard on books and we would like to see this Bible hold up for several years of, hopefully, daily use.

This impressive and extensive children’s Bible is highly recommended as a gift for any occasion such as birthdays, Easter, Christmas, or baptisms.

**Sherri Myers**

Authors Steve Jenkins and Robin Page present some surprising facts about animal siblings in this beautifully illustrated book, Sisters and Brothers: Sibling Relationships in the Animal World. The cliche, "Survival of the fittest" takes on new meaning as readers learn about spotted hyenas who fight so fiercely with their same-sex siblings that one of them usually dies. And the stronger black widow spiders will eat their weaker brothers and sisters.

Male cheetahs provide an excellent example of the expression "Closer than a brother" as we read about these hunters who stay together throughout their lives, and the male wild turkeys who help their strongest brother attract females. Young readers can learn about the importance of relying on their parents from the baby Nile crocodiles who hide in their parents' mouths when danger is present.

Among other interesting facts so beautifully portrayed in this book, adopted children can relate to the cichlid fish who may end up hatching catfish eggs in her mouth right alongside her own eggs. Similarly, when myna birds’ eggs hatch, they sometimes discover a much larger bird, the baby koel, who has been left in the myna’s nest. This adopted sibling shows no gratitude and often pushes the baby mynas out of their nest.

Who lays the most eggs? Which animal can run up to 200 miles per hour? Which is among the smallest mammals on earth? These questions and more will be answered in this engaging picture book.

Jenkins’ cut- & torn-paper collage illustrations complement the written details and hold readers captivated as they learn scientific facts in a fun, fascinating way. Adult readers will also learn new information and gain a better understanding of creatures found throughout the world.

Floss Craig


Author Alice McGill’s great-grandmother, Mama Jane, is the source of this folktale that has been passed on through the generations, originally told by her grandma’s mama, Jane. Way Up and Over Everything is a ‘flying’ story which originated out of the slaves’ wish for freedom from their cruel captivity. The illustrations drawn by Jude Daly in this hardcover children’s book are done using earthy colors and enhance the story quite well to the point which they tell the story almost on their own without words. Whips, chains, dogs, and threats were a major part of a slave’s daily life and mentions of them are present throughout this story. A short explanation from parents about slavery should satisfy a child’s concerns. The end of the book has a short description of slavery and the origins of this story written by the author.

Sherri Myers
What to Do About Alice? is the story of irrepressible Alice Lee Roosevelt, a strong willed child who “ate up the world.” Her father said, “I can be president of the United States, or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both.”

This fast paced, upbeat book follows Alice from her dislike of being pitied, through her self-education in her father’s library, to the White House at age seventeen. She meets guests at the door with her pet snake, teaches her step-siblings to sled down the entry way stairs, and travels on her “Best Official Behavior” as a good will ambassador for the United States. Much of the story is told through the digitally rendered, retro style art work of Edwin Fotheringham.

Conservative women’s groups call her behavior outrageous; she drives her own car, plays poker, bets on horse races, and dances all night. She travels to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Asia. Her father writes “You were of real service down there [Puerto Rico] because you made those people feel that you liked them and took an interest in them…”

Alice’s later life is expanded in the back of the book. She becomes a trusted political advisor to her father and her husband, Congressman Nick Longworth. She champions causes and hobnobs. As a young woman she is known as “Princess Alice,” and is later called “the other Washington Monument.” She never takes herself too seriously and her most famous quip, embroidered on a pillow on her sofa, is “If you haven’t got anything good to say about anyone, come and sit by me.”

This book puts a positive spin on the life of a vivacious, strong willed woman who was ahead of her time. Though her endurance in the tough political climate of Washington, D.C. was admirable, a broader look at her character would tell a less romantic, but still historic, story.

Kristen Michalski


PAP 0547119348, 9780547119342, $14.95

A beautiful bird lights on the branch of the birch tree in your front yard. You glance a second time and notice a special color on its beak. A melody fills the air. Suddenly your curiosity is aroused; what kind of bird visited you today? The Young Birder’s Guide to Birds of Eastern North America by Bill Thompson III might solve your problem.

This guide is perfect for any beginning birder. Opening pages provide tips for what to wear, what to bring, what to look for, where to look, proper manners, and much more! Remaining portions of this exciting guide provide close-up photos of each bird, what to look for, what to listen for, where to find birds, special features and a trivia fact about each bird listed. Resources, a glossary, and an index complete this excellent source for the novice birder.

Mary Vee

Fic 215 p.; 19 cm.


Fic 234 p.; 18 cm.


Fic 170 p.; 22 cm.


Fic 183 p.; 22 cm.

Nancy Springer, well-known for her young adult stories, expertly draws young readers into the events of the Victorian era. Each of these mystery titles bears the subtitle, “an Enola Holmes Mystery.” Fans of Nancy Drew or Sherlock Holmes will be delighted with this interesting and fast-paced series. Enola is the Nancy Drew of her day. You may recall that Sherlock Holmes had a brother Mycroft. The brothers of the teen girl Enola are Mycroft and Sherlock.

Springer has done a masterful job in staying true to the spirit of Conan Doyle stories while giving this series an upbeat and realistic look at Victorian social values and life with special emphasis on the role of women in society. There is a wealth of historical information that will not only intrigue young readers but entice them to return to the series. Her use of the first person is occasionally jarring, but it effectively heightens the tension and the sense that Enola, the main character, is living minute to minute, where a false diagnosis may haunt her forever.

Enola lives by her wits and gives enough concern for others that the reader is drawn to appreciate its consequences. There is a growing respect and affection that Sherlock and Enola develop for each other as the series progresses. These historical fiction novels enable young readers to see how Enola grapples with loneliness and unexpected events, and how she applies her intelligence and sense of humor to situations.

Each title can easily be read as a stand-alone title; however, the storyline becomes more filled in as one moves from The Case of the Missing Marquess to The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan. The endings of each title satisfy and also leave things ripe for a sequel.


Fic 384 p.; 19 cm.

Chanda’s Wars by Allan Stratton is the story of an African girl who must save her younger brother and sister after they are kidnapped and forced to serve as child soldiers in General Mandili’s rebel army. Chanda visits her extended family after being estranged from them after her...
mother’s death from AIDs. She visits them after having dreams for several weeks. The visit results in forgiveness all around for the family.

In the midst of the visit, Mandiki attacks and the children are kidnapped. Family members are killed. Chanda and Nelson, a neighbor, go after the children despite the danger they face. Chanda uses the knowledge her neighbor, Mr. Lesole, has taught her about the bush. Nelson is an excellent tracker.

Chanda’s Wars engages you from the very first page. It is a page turner that is hard to put down. The reader learns of the struggle Chanda goes through in getting the government to acknowledge Mandiki’s presence. Chanda learns of the length the government will go to keep the tourist coming instead of tackling Mandiki openly and honestly. Afterwards, soldiers tell Chanda not to tell what happened. The government wants to keep everything quiet.

Caution for the reader as there is profanity, graphic talk of the violence, rape, AIDS, witchcraft, and black magic in the book.

Mary Ruth Dilling


HBB 0618683070, 9780618683079, $16.00
PAP 0618683354, 9780618683358, $8.99
Fic 275 p.; 22 cm.


HBB 0618686959, 9780618686957, $16.00
PAP 0618934936, 9780618934935, $8.99
Fic 277 p.; 22 cm.

HS Rating: 3, w/caution

DJ Schwenk is the Dairy Queen, a fifteen-year-old, saddled with the responsibility of a dairy farm due to her father’s disability. Enter Brian Nelson, rival school quarterback without a work ethic, who needs to build his strength and stamina. His coach, a friend of the Schwenks, enlists DJ to train him under the guise of helping out on the farm. Practice with Brian makes DJ realize she wants to play football, but she isn’t ready to admit it to her parents. However, the first girl to try out to play high school football tends to become public. Family tensions, a question of scholastic qualifications, and a growing attraction to Brian keep DJ off balance until the final chapter.

The Off Season finds DJ facing off against the quarterback she trained. Her feelings about her relatives, best friend, school, sports, and romance run the gamut between confusion, anger, and hope. Life becomes more complicated as she copes with her first boyfriend, notoriety, an injury that endangers her ability to play sports, and a family tragedy. These simultaneous events come close to overwhelming the irrepressible heroine, but once again DJ comes to terms with her self-doubts and rises to the occasion as a reliable source of strength for those she loves.

Both books in the series absorb the reader as we root for this beleaguered teen. Catherine Murdock entertains us in DJ’s self-deprecating voice. DJ calls it the way she sees it, and her viewpoint is downright hilarious. Hard work and real life have left her with few illusions. Football tops the pyramid of sports obsession in this family who corral their feelings behind well-guarded fences. DJ learns about choices and sacrifices. She makes a point of avoiding church. Some profanity is sprinkled throughout the first two books, and recreational drinking is accepted as a given for the high school set. Her exposure to lesbian behavior and its consequences follows the path of political correctness. Tragedy matures DJ and empowers a newfound self-confidence.

Deborah H. Rabern

Keeping the night watch/ Hope Anita Smith ; with illustrations by E.B. Lewis. 1st ed. LCCN 2007012372. New York: Henry Holt, 1008.

HBB 0805072020, 9780805072020, $18.95
Fic 73 p.: col. ill.; 26 cm.

MS Rating: 5

Keeping the Night Watch by Anita Smith Hope is a book of poetry in which an African American 13 year old deals with the feelings of anger, hope, abandonment, and fear when his father returns after leaving his family. It is filled with very potent word pictures. Keeping the Night Watch deals with forgiveness and moving on. The poems are filled with deep meanings that capture readers from middle school and up. Hope’s book is good for read-aloud. The book chronicles the changes of a young man as he changes from youth to manhood and learns to forgive.
C.J., the thirteen year old, doesn't understand why the rest of the family has forgiven the father. There are scars, though, as Zuri, the sister, sleeps at the foot of the front door. C.J. makes the rounds every night and tucks his sister back into bed.

C.J. also experiences the touch of first love. He learns how to reach out to express himself and his feelings to his girl. Readers will enjoy the blush of love's first journey. C.J.'s father teaches him how to treat a lady in a roundabout way to get him to listen.

The quality of the illustrations by E. B. Lewis is first rate. They show the emotional confusion of the young man in each of the poems. They take you where he is.

Mary Ruth Dilling


PAP 0764206060, 9780764206061, $14.99
Fic 361 p.; 22 cm.
HS (Adult) Rating: 3

Readers who enjoy action-adventure with a good bit of mystery thrown in will enjoy Robin Parrish's novel Offworld. When astronaut Christopher Burke and his small crew are on their way home from Mars, they suddenly lose contact with Mission Control about two months before landing—and they never regain it. When they miraculously survive their dramatic landing at Kennedy Space Center, they exit the spacecraft only to discover that nobody is there. In fact, the four astronauts appear to be the only humans on earth.

Chris, Trisha, Terry, and Owen see a massive column of light shining from Houston and figure that it must be the source of whatever caused everybody's disappearance; they commandeer a couple of vehicles and make the long journey from Florida to Texas—and discover Mae. She claims to be a street-girl who got "lost in the cracks" and has no clear idea of what happened—or why she is still here when nobody else is.

The group encounters numerous trials and life-threatening situations on their journey to Houston—including running into Colonel Roston and his soldiers. Roston is the mastermind behind the disappearance of humankind. Colonel Roston intends to centralize all money, weapons, and resources so they cannot be used by power-hungry rulers, and instead be used to create a peaceful utopian society, to which he then intends to return the inhabitants of earth—fully under his control, of course.

Offworld is an exciting action read; the characters all have realistic quirks and unique interactions and relationships with each other, but true to larger-than-life heroes, they somehow manage to have nine lives and incredible stamina, considering all the trauma they face. Offworld is not a book to question too deeply—but it is certainly one to be read for the enjoyment of the adventure.

Sherri Beeler

*  


HBB 1416975829, 9781416975823, $15.99

PAP 1416978038, 9781416978039, $6.99
Fic 304 p.; 22 cm.
HS (Upper MS, Adult) Rating: *5

Set in Chicago in 1968, The Rock and the River is both historical and historic in its honest inquiry into the Civil Rights Movement and racism in the United States. 13-year-old Sam has always followed the rules and done what he's supposed to do. But what is a young black man to do in a world filled with senseless prejudice and violence? Sam's father is a civil rights activist devoted to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the principles of nonviolence. Sam's older brother "Stick" secretly becomes a Black Panther committed to education and service, but not opposed to carrying a gun. Sam sees two police officers brutally beat his friend Bucky and charge him unjustly with assault and resisting arrest. When Dr. King is assassinated and Bucky's case goes to trial, Sam is caught in the turbulence of change. Should he follow his father's patient example or join Stick in seeking more immediate justice?

While the story itself is fictional, Kekla Magoon includes an Author's Note explaining the history behind Dr. King's Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panthers. The racial and ideological conflicts, however, are merely the backdrop as Magoon hones in on the struggle of one middle class teenager unavoidably enmeshed in conflict. The depth of her characters and their relationships will challenge readers to probe their own hearts and minds. There are several violent scenes, but they are necessary to the story and not excessively graphic or sensationalized. Magoon also refrains from offering any oversimplified answers, allowing each of her
characters (and empowering her readers) to find their own way. The clarity of language and elegance of style give the novel an element of grace that makes it worth reading more than once.

Laurie A. Gray


PAP 1400073391, 9781400073399, $13.99
Fic 398 p.; 21 cm.
HS (Adult) Rating: 3

The Vanishing Sculptor by Donita K. Paul is an adventure into the land of fantasy. Since her father’s disappearance, some fifteen years ago, Tipper has had difficulty in maintaining her family’s estate. To make ends meet she is forced to sell many of her father’s works of art. When her father suddenly returns, it’s discovered she has sold three statues which are essential in keeping their world intact. A quest is mounted to retrieve the pieces and Tipper grows from a sheltered girl to the young heir to the throne she is destined to be. Filled with dragons, otherworldly creatures, and strange customs, the quest has a lightly veiled allegory to discovering who the creator of the world truly is.

Although this can be read as a stand alone, it might be necessary to read Paul’s award winning DragonKeeper series to best understand Tipper’s world. The elements of an adventurous fantasy are present, yet the plot moves slowly, as there is more telling than showing. The dialogue is often circular, which also slows down the pace. Some of the characters are more memorable than others, such as the introduction of Jayrus, a dragon keeper, while others remain stereotypes, like the wizard and the librarian. The allegory of discovering the truth of the creator could be explored more. The appendix of people and terms glossary proved helpful. Fans of Donita K. Paul, and for those who enjoy lighter fantasies, should consider reading The Vanishing Sculptor.

Pam Webb

HBB 1932425578, 9781932425574, $18.95
811/.54 72 p. : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
HS (Adult) Rating: 4

The Freedom Business by Marilyn Nelson with art by Deborah Dancy presents the autobiographical narrative of Venture Smith. Smith lived in the 18th century as a slave who eventually bought his own freedom and that of his family. Venture’s narrative briefly summarizes most of his life—from his childhood in Africa to his old age.

To elicit emotion from Venture’s rather straightforward text, Nelson has composed poems highlighting incidents to which Venture may have only briefly covered. For example, in one sentence Venture relates that on the slave ship from Africa to Barbados, of the 260 who started the trip, only 200 arrived. The accompanying poem “A Voyage by Sea” spends some time on this incident, bringing attention to the 60 passengers who died along the way “graveless as garbage.”

Marilyn Nelson’s poetry is primarily free verse. She uses not only her imagination, but also her knowledge of the culture and beliefs of the times to create thought provoking poetry. At times Nelson uses some potentially offensive language in response to the inconceivable situations forced upon the slaves in her effort to elicit from the reader a raw, emotional reaction to Venture Smith’s rather sparse prose. Also, in one poem, Nelson notes that the slaves’ “traditional beliefs toppled under Christian values,” and in a separate poem, she references the Ancestor’s spirits. The word choices Nelson utilizes create wonderfully rich visuals, such as, “I had spun money out of sweat.” Venture Smith’s inspiring narrative is a study in determination. While he presents a very small part of the atrocity of slavery, he gives a thorough picture of how a sequence of choices can impact the outcome of one’s life. With the help of Nelson’s poetry, a terrible season in America’s history and the ability of one man to surmount impossible odds takes on life.

Deborah Dancy’s art is a series of different mediums and gives her response to the stories and poems instead of illustrating them.

Kristi Wolcott


HBB 1426304625, 9781426304620, $17.95
LIB 1426304633, 9781426304637, $26.89
388.4/28097471 96 p. : ill., map ; 25 cm.
MS (HS) Rating: 4

An intriguing look into the development of the subway, Secret Subway begins with the problems surrounding the growth of New York City—limited space, overcrowding, extreme congestion, and pollution. Ultimately, Martin Sandler presents the solution of the subway from the standpoint of an extraordinary man, Alfred Ely Beach. Beach has worked in the publishing business with his father; at age 19 he purchases the struggling Scientific American Journal, transforming it into a clearing house for technological breakthroughs. As a result, Beach has extraordinary insight into the possibilities of technology.

The corrupt politics of New York City, notably Boss Tweed, ties the city’s financial interests to the status quo. Beach, avoiding the common practice of bribery, deceives the city by obtaining a permit to build an underground pneumatic mail system. In reality, he is building his subway in secret. Discovered only at the very end of this massive undertaking, Beach reveals his luxurious, pollution-free subway to the public in the midst of great celebration. Unfortunately, financial depression prohibits Beach from fully realizing his dream, yet his work inspires the final completion of the subway system at the turn of the century, alleviating the congestion problem that has burdened the city. Selected books and websites for further reading, sources for quotes, and an index complete the book.

The text is well-phrased, presented in the context with historical photos, maps, political cartoons and drawings. Secret Subway is an example of American ingenuity and persistence. It is an excellent resource for student research. Beach’s foresight takes into consideration everything needed for building including social acceptance, pollution, ease of transportation; his example is one we can use to think of our own problems in a broader perspective. This book will be a
particular inspiration to students participating in the National Engineers Week Future Cities Competition.

Kristine Wildner

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HBB 1590784626, 9781590784624, $17.95
629.13/0973 134 p. : ill. ; 25 cm.
MS (INT) Rating: *5

Anyone interested in the history of flight will find Norman H. Finkelstein’s *Three Across: The Great Transatlantic Air Race of 1927* a fascinating read. The book is full of technical and personal information about those who built, financed, and flew the first airplanes to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. Seeking after the coveted Orteig Prize offered to the first person to achieve this feat, many pilots suffered tragic defeats because even take-offs and landings were dangerous in those early days, and some were lost at sea.

Finkelstein’s details bring to life the personalities of those heroes, especially the Orteig Prize winner, Charles A. Lindbergh, the American pilot who flew from Curtis Field, New York, to Paris, France, arriving May 21, 1927 after 33 hours and 30 minutes in flight. The author describes him as a humble man whose win he attributed to the team of engineers, designers, and mechanics who excelled at their work. And upon landing, Lindbergh phoned his mother to let her know he had arrived safely. The personality traits described, and conflicts between pilots and the owners of the planes bring an interesting aspect to this book. Readers can take a lesson from Lindbergh’s humility and Charles A. Levin’s concern for his wife when he was the unexpected pilot of the Columbia. As famous as they were, they still considered others more important than themselves.

The black and white photos give readers a good sense of the time period and rudimentary attempts at designing and flying planes that have come a long way in the years leading up to the present. Photo captions clearly identify the persons, places, and planes shown. This book is appropriate, not only for students, but also for adults interested in this pivotal period of North American and European history.

Floss Craig

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HBB 155143900X, 9781551439006, $19.95
305.23086/949 89 p. : col. ill., maps ; 13 cm.
MS (HS) Rating: 4

While American children learn about war in history and read about the horrors of the Holocaust, as adults we shelter them from the realities of war, particularly with contemporary hostilities. As a result, many children, particularly boys, romanticize war, imagine carrying a gun, and yet know little of the consequences of war. *When Elephants Fight* changes the traditional perspective by focusing on the point of view of children in war. Eric Walters and Adrian Bradbury have a passion for telling these stories of children surrounded by current wars. Proceeds from the book support Ugandan child refugees.

Each of the five sections begins with a personal story of one child living amidst acute violence. This unique feature compels the reader to make immediate text-to-self connections. The children have families, friends, go to school; yet their lives are so torn by the violence and fear of attack, the reader quickly grasps the realities of violence on individual lives.

Following the story of the child is a quick overview of each country (population, ethnicity, religion, life expectancy, etc.), its history, and the immediate war situation. With a focus on particular issues affecting children directly (child soldiers, colonialism, September 11, etc.) the authors take care to explain the wars in language children can comprehend. Unfortunately, this task is formidable; it is difficult for anyone to fully understand the complexities of modern war. Color photographs and simple maps punctuate the text showing the faces, feelings, and emotions of the children.

*When Elephants Fight* is an excellent tool in teaching world politics, or to extend the lessons of the Jewish Holocaust to the present day. Although it lacks an index and bibliography, nevertheless, students will find it to be a tremendous resource for research with enough information to provide solid background and spur additional

PAP 0307444740, 9780307444745, $9.99
Fic 344 p.; 20 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

The Confidential Life of Eugenia Cooper introduces Gennie, the irrepressible daughter of wealthy New Yorkers. Gennie's favorite guilty pleasure is reading dime novels about Mae West, woman of the Wild West. Therefore, when the opportunity to leave Manhattan for Colorado presents itself, Gennie hops on board a train, ready for an adventure and her temporary duties as a governess. She only feels slightly torn about leaving behind Chandler Dodd who expects to win her heart and hand in marriage.

On reaching Colorado, tension builds as Gennie tries not to fall for her employer, Daniel Beck, and his daughter, knowing Chandler awaits her return. When a whole town gets the wrong idea about leaving behind Chandler Dodd who expects to win her heart and hand in marriage.

Kathleen Y'Barbo's historical romance about the impulsive Eugenia Cooper opens the door into the Old West of 1880. As Gennie discovers, the West isn't exactly as it is portrayed in her western dime novels. She expected primitive living and found a mansion. In fact, as Gennie learns that people and situations aren't always what they appear, she learns the dangers of a judgmental spirit. This plot-driven book moves quickly as Gennie dives deeper and deeper into her adventure, which also doesn't turn out like she expected. The pace of the novel is broken up by short blurbs from the Mae West books Gennie likes to read. The well-written dialogue showcases Gennie's sparkly personality as well as Charlotte's belligerence. Humorous situations keep the story light but not frivolous. Gennie's adventures are a delight to read and a portal into a different era.

Kristi Wolcott


PAP 0736924779, 9780736924771, $14.99
Fic 318 p.; 23 cm.
Adult Rating: 3

Daniel Borden is a successful stocks analyst whose career has landed him the good life. He may have lost in love, but he still has all he needs and is not looking to change his world. Laura lost her husband to cancer, and she may lose the bed and breakfast inn they started just prior to his death, but she keeps on with the daily struggles of making ends meet because it means so much to her son Andy. Two separate people who come together to share the same problem is the basis for Daniel's Den by Brandt Olson.

This suspenseful novel contains an intriguing plotline of investment laundering which is backed by credible technical details. There are enough twists to keep the pages turning from chapter to chapter, at least for the majority of the book. However, the once solid plot unravels once Daniel and Laura meet up and have to run from their common enemy. The ending becomes contrived and the details quickly fade into a "happily ever after ending" that could have been satisfying had it all not happened so quickly.

For those who like their mysteries and suspense stories clean, with no sex, swearing, and not much in the way of gratuitous violence, Daniel's Den is to be bookmarked. The author manages to work in a conversion scene for each of the main characters without having it becoming trite and planted. There tends to be over exposition on characters which halts the flow of the story, making it seem like a movie script in the making at times.

Overall, Daniel's Den is companion reading for those who like authors Dee Henderson, Brandilyn Collins, and Terri Blackstock.

Pam Webb


PAP 0736920838, 9780736920834, $13.99
Fic 392 p.; 22 cm.
Adult Rating: 3


PAP 0736924744, 9780736924740, $13.99
Fic 346 p.; 22 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

As Marie's Belanger's husband wraps up his military tour of duty in Japan, Marie leaves the country to visit her...
family in Maine. Her journey goes terribly awry when her airplane seatmate is shot and killed in an airport restroom—and Marie discovers a computer flash-drive that’s not hers, in her carry-on bag. Concluding that it probably carries sensitive military information, Marie takes radical evasive maneuvers to throw off the sinister-looking men who appear to be tailing her.

Finding Marie, by Susan Page Davis, is a novel that will leave readers breathless as Marie escapes from numerous dangerous situations. As a new Christian, Marie’s faith in God deepens as she depends on Him for physical endurance and guidance in each terrifying circumstance she faces. This novel follows Davis’ Frasier Island, but can easily be read independently.

Inside Story, third in the series by Davis, introduces readers to Marie’s independent, prize-winning journalist sister, Claudia. Although Claudia has an exciting life traveling to far-away places to write about unique topics, she has begun to wish that she might have a home life and children. She briefly connects with Lieutenant Bill White and would like to pursue a relationship, but his military work and her job keep them separated. Bill is strongly drawn to Claudia, but is cautious about developing a serious relationship since she is not a Christian.

In order to write an article on women in special operations, Claudia is inserted into a military team undertaking the dangerous rescue of an aerophysicist in the Philippine jungle—a team that, to her surprise, includes Bill. As Claudia faces the worst danger of her life, she comes to know the saving grace of God through the constant testimony of the female soldier she is featuring in her article.

Both of Davis’ books present strong female characters who, while secure in their femininity, are also able to face amazing challenges and trials with strength and grace. Finding Marie loses momentum toward the end and begins to drag a bit, but Inside Story introduces readers to a variety of unique cultures and experiences through Claudia’s travels, and both novels show characters who develop and grow in their Christian faith.

Sherri Beeler


HBB 0385337450, 9780385337458, $25.00
PAP 0385337469, 9780385337465, $15.00
Fic 327 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (Upper HS) Rating: 3, w/ caution

Twelve-year-old Ren is an abandoned, one-handed orphan living in a New England monastery in the 1800s. He longs for a family and wonders about his origins. Tied to this mystery are questions about how he lost his hand. When Benjamin arrives to adopt Ren, claiming to be a long lost relative, Ren hopes that his dreams of family will be fulfilled. Instead, Benjamin whisks him into the company of thieves and scam artists. As Ren works with these con men, he grows to care about them and finds that his past is linked to their collective future.

The Good Thief by Hannah Tinti takes readers on a grim journey. The protagonist is 12 years of age, but the events he encounters range from grave robbing, corpse trafficking, and swindling to pipe smoking and ale drinking. Ren plays a neutral role in many of these activities and does not actively seek them out—they are foisted upon him. However, Ren rarely resists and seems to feel little shame, disgust, or real anger. His emotions remain at arm’s length through much of the tale. There are some subtle sexual references and a brief description of a suicide in the book, but Tinti does portray Christians in a fairly positive light.

It is disconcerting that Ren’s propensity for thieving comes across as a natural and acceptable part of his life. Even in the orphanage, pick pocketing appears to be an integral part of his nature—a mechanism to make sense of his world. As the book progresses, the reader does see positive traits in Ren. He cares deeply for his companions and sacrifices for them in numerous ways, but he only occasionally feels remorse for his unethical actions.

This is an interesting look into a dark worldview, but appropriate only for adults and the most mature teens. Read with discernment.

Jaclyn S. Miller


PAP 0764205234, 9780764205231, $13.99
Fic 350 p.; 21 cm.
Adult Rating: 5
Recently divorced, flat broke, and loathing the aspect of having anything to do with her estranged father, even if it means collecting her inheritance, Sarah Graham arrives in the tiny mountain town of Jonah, New York. It’s so small it doesn’t appear on any map. She discovers the terms of the will stipulate she must live in Jonah for six months before collecting any money. Not game to do so at first, she finds herself stranded when her car is stolen. She commits to the terms and sets on a journey where her past and present collide in most unexpected ways.

Home Another Way, the debut novel by Christa Parrish, provides an entrancing approach to finding emancipation from past sins. Parrish delivers Sarah’s story through first person narrative, yet weaves in third person vignettes of the other main characters. Jarring at first, the plot benefits from this unconventional storytelling approach. As an award-winning journalist Parrish knows how to provide the pertinent details, add color to the story, and clip off unneeded sentimentality. Sarah Graham is as lost as the biblical Jonah, the symbolism is ironic and noted. One of the more edgy Christian novels evidenced lately, there are references to Sarah’s one-night stand, how she tries to seduce the local pastor, and uses slang terms for her best friend’s lack of certain female anatomy. Yet, these are in context since they show the realistic faults of the main character; in fact, all the characters resonate in their imperfections. The story lingers as the last page is tucked away. Further offerings by this new talent will be anticipated.


- HBB 0670018252, 9780670018253, $26.95
- PAP 0143114395, 9780143114390, $14.95

Jan Karon begins the Father Tim novels with Home to Holly Springs. Father Tim Kavanagh is enjoying retirement with his wife when he receives an unsigned letter telling him to “Come home” to Holly Springs, Mississippi, a place he has not seen in 38 years.

Kavanagh heads south to see what his hometown might still hold for him. What he finds is a pleasant mix of old places containing new faces. As he makes his way through town, word spreads that he’s back and he starts receiving invitations to visit people from his past. Those visits lead Father Tim down a sometimes painful road. They also allow him to rediscover parts of his childhood and find reconciliation in places he never expects. As his visit draws to a close, he discovers who sent the letter and why he had to come back. Ultimately, he finds someone in his family he’s never met.

Even with the sensitive circumstances, there is no objectionable language or graphic details to distract the reader. Karon presents and resolves the situations with enough details to tell the story and nothing crude or sensational. The story is appealing and keeps the reader interested until the end. At the same time, readers can relate to the humanity of Kavanagh, the situations he confronts, and his desire to honor God in all his actions.

Rachel Langston


- HBB 0982060920, 9780982060926, $21.95
- PAP 0978516559, 9780978516550, $12.95

A collection of short stories, McGowan’s Call by Rob Smith, brings us into the life and ministry of a pastor in small town America. In this contemporary fiction, Davis McGowan pastors several churches before landing in Hatteras, Ohio, where,

“...being liked was as good as it could get in a place where he would never really belong.”

Each story is well written and stands alone, but is so much a part of Davis’s life that they blend together like a four
-course meal. We meet the local homeless man, Brodie, and see how Davis finds creative ways to meet his needs without shaming him. We watch Davis break into a close-knit group by meeting for coffee each morning with the guys. We go with Pastor McGowan on his hospital visits and enter the lives of those facing heartache. We join Davis and Beth on vacation and glimpse how they love and support each other in the fishbowl life that is ministry. The longest of the stories is a mystery novella with twist and turns that keep you guessing.

As we meet each new character we see a different facet of Davis McGowan's character; a gem but not without flaws, likeable and real. There is little or no direct mention of Davis's relationship with God, few examples of prayer or how he works through personal conflict. There are references to pushy and demanding church members revealing how Davis deals with their expectation on a human level, but not in the spiritual realm.

I recommend this book with caution. In one of the stories Davis, and his wife Beth, have cocktails. There are two or three times profanity, though not obscene, is used. In one situation Pastor McGowan chooses deception in order to protect a member of the church.

Suzanne Sharpe


PAP 1590529359, 9781590529355, $13.99

Marky Mynheir presents readers with a captivating new series; the first book entitled The Night Watchman. The protagonist, Ray Quinn, is a former homicide detective who lives in pain. The physical pain comes from his replacement hip, a result of the shot that ended his career. His emotional pain is from the same shootout, and the fact that he could not help his partner who was gunned down next to him. Spiritually? Ray tries to numb that side of his life with Jim Beam and John Wayne movies. Ruined for police work, Ray takes a job as a night watchman at a high-end condo building. While on shift he discovers a murder-suicide. The victim's sister pleads with Ray to investigate and clear her brother's name. Ray discovers there is more to the crime than he expected and the true killer might be the one who gunned down his partner.

Mynheir writes with knowledge and authority since his day job is a detective with the Criminal Investigations Unit in Central Florida. His novel crackles with authentic details, and his first person narrative style is reminiscent of Bogey style monologue with Bruce Willis cynical humor thrown in. The overall plot is full of intriguing turns and satisfying character development; however, the underlying plot is one of note. Pam, the victim's sister, is determined to clear her brother, a pastor who had an inner city ministry, of the wrongful act of murder attached to him, and is determined to point out to Ray that God is working in his life. Mynheir provides Pam's faithful outlook as a platform of presenting real questions a non-believer could have when his life has been torn up and shredded. Also of note is the lack of gratuitous violence or profanity, and it is not missed nor is its absence obvious. With this being only his fourth book to date Mynheir steps in as a real contender in the suspense/mystery/detective genre.

Pam Webb


PAP 1595542116, 9781595542113, $14.99

Fic 316 p.; 22 cm.

In The Passion of Mary-Margaret, Lisa Samson shares the story of Mary-Margaret Fisher, child of an unwed mother who dies during her birth. At age eight, Mary-Margaret goes to live at St. Mary's Convent School. From then on, she wants nothing more than to serve Jesus as a religious sister. Fisher soon realizes Jesus has other plans. Her service to will require lifelong obedience and sacrifice. When she meets and befriends Jude Keller, the difficult, destructive son of a local resident, she relies on her unique relationship with Jesus to sustain her. Her commitment is further tested when Jesus asks her to dedicate her life to Jude instead of to the Sisters.

The story, written in the form of Mary-Margaret's journal, addresses serious issues. Mary-Margaret is born to an unwed mother and spends much of her life believing she was conceived
by a “raping seminarian”. Later, Mary-Margaret narrowly escapes being raped herself.

Jude faces a number of difficulties including drug use, prostitution, and sexually-transmitted diseases. These things make him a sympathetic character but are difficult to read. Even describing the serious subject matter, the language is not offensive or crude but specific.

Another element to consider is Mary-Margaret’s relationship with Jesus. It’s portrayed in a, somewhat, unusual manner. Mary-Margaret explains “you will have to suspend your disbelief or do an in-depth study of Christian mystics who enjoyed an unusual relationship with Christ...”. The relationship is portrayed as Christ being physically present and participating with her in human interactions on a regular basis. In one case, He has tea with her.

The author’s use of Mary-Margaret’s journal can be confusing. She is in her 70’s when she writes it. Consequently, there are times when the story jumps around a little bit and it can be a little hard to follow.

There are some important lessons to be learned from the story. Certainly, Mary-Margaret’s obedience to Christ and sacrifice of her own desires are good examples of what Christ wants from all His followers. Ultimately, by following Christ’s plan, Mary-Margaret experiences many more things that she would have if she had disregarded Christ’s call.

Rachel Langston

Rain Song / Alice J. Wisler.


PAP 0764204777, 9780764204777, $13.99
Fic 295 p.; 22 cm.

Adult Rating: 4

Rain Song, the debut novel of Alice J. Wisler, offers a charming plot that is partially a mystery with overtones of a romance. The story centers on Nicole, who lives a solitary life which is focused around her interactions with her quirky southern relatives and caring for her aquarium of fish. Her life is filled with teaching middle school English and periodically writing an on-line column for Pretty Fishy. It is through her column that she becomes acquainted with Harrison who lives in Japan and owns a koi pond. Nicole has strong ties with Japan, having been born there to missionary parents; however, her mother tragically died there when Nicole was but a toddler. Nicole vows she will not return to the land of her birth, no matter that her correspondence with Harrison reveals he knew her as a child. Nicole begins to waver as the mystery of her mother’s death begins to unravel, and she tries to overcome her apprehensions of flying and returning to her birthplace.

Wisler’s style is captivating. The story unfolds as a soliloquy of sorts, as Nicole goes through life. Set in North Carolina, readers enjoy the cast of distinctive relatives, ranging from the matriarch Ducee to the wild child Monet. Each character adds to the story in such a way that the eccentricities add and not distract. Amid life’s emergencies such as an ailing grandmother and a cousin’s failing marriage there is quibbling over serving cucumber sandwiches at the family reunion luncheon and the need to make and provide pineapple chutney for all occasions. The heartbeat of the story is pineapple chutney, and the old family recipe is provided. Tender spiritual truths are present, mainly those dwelling on the strength of faith, even if it is just a seed. Gently-paced, this story was surprisingly a page-turner.

Pam Webb

Saints in limbo / River Jordan.


PAP 0307446700, 9780307446701, $13.99
Fic 345 p.; 21 cm.

Adult Rating: 4

Saints in Limbo explores the mysteries of the human heart and the beauty of a life transformed by hope.

When the reality of her husband’s death sets in, Velma True’s life becomes tethered to her front porch in Echo, Florida. She clings to distant memories of Joe, certain that her purpose in life has vanished. Then suddenly, on her birthday, a stranger appears and presents her with a special gift. What appears to be a common river rock soon becomes a port to another time and place—a place where Joe still lives, where her son, Rudy, brims with potential, and where life is simple. The memories give her hope, but also a sense of fear. Someone or something dangerous is looking for the rock.

After noticing strange behavior, Rudy decides to move in for a couple of days...
to make sure things are going well. Hardened by the world and embracing a mediocre life, helping Velma gives Rudy an opportunity to become more than he dreamed.

River Jordan weaves together several individual stories and creates an unforgettable journey; a journey of freedom. She does not shy away from the intimacies shared between married couples, the supernatural time travel that is at times mystical, and an evil presence which alludes to spiritual warfare. The collection of experiences seems disjointed and awkward at first but soon flows together with River Jordan’s poignant voice and poetic storytelling. 

_Saints in Limbo_ is an unforgettable novel with likeable characters and a powerful message.

_Lindsey Norman_


PAP 0764205757, 9780764205750, $13.99
Fic 294 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

The _Tender Grace_ of the day has been lost to widow Audrey Eaton. Without her husband, she doesn’t know if she can live life to the fullest, or if she wants to. But she is compelled to take a trip out west—a trip her husband had wanted to take. By starting her journey she realizes,

“T’m a long way from holding a glass half full, or even half empty, but I think I’ve peeked into the cabinet where the glasses are kept.”

Her travelogue of beautiful landscapes, historical sites, daily Bible readings, interesting new friends, comforting old ones, and risky encounters are written with such engaging details and acute emotion that the reader can’t help but go along the journey with her. Will she begin to see the grace of each day God has given her? Can she live an abundant life with Christ as her only lover? Stark answers these emotional questions with tender honesty and compelling faith.

_Ellie Soderstrom_


PAP 0310259339, 9780310259336, $12.99
Fic 325 p.; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 3


HBB 0310259347, 9780310259343, $14.99
Fic 351 p.; 22 cm.


PAP 0310272130, 9780310272137, $12.99
Fic 336 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Don Brown’s Navy Justice series begins with _Treason_, which details the story of Zack Brewer, a JAG officer accused of raping the niece of a prominent politician. Despite facing his long-term rival Diane Colcernian, who serves as the defense counsel, Zack wins the hard-fought case. His skill in this case catches the attention of the President of the United States, who requests him to prosecute a group of Islamic men who joined the U.S. Navy as Islamic chaplains with the hidden agenda of damaging the United States from inside the military system. Ironically, Diane becomes Zack’s assistant for this significant trial, and as they work to be sure justice is served, they find an abiding love for each other.

Second in the series is _Hostage_, which follows Zack and Diane’s successful prosecution of the Navy chaplain terrorists. Unfortunately there are still a few faithful Islamics undercover in the U.S. military. When it appears that the United States has fired missiles and destroyed the Dome of the Rock, the world is outraged. The real perpetrators of the act—Islamic terrorists—are captured, and Zack is again appointed as prosecutor for their trial. However, radical Islamics kidnap Diane and deliver an ultimatum that requires Zack to choose between pursuing justice, or preserving Diane’s life.

Author Don Brown spent five years in the Navy as part of the JAG Corps; he brings his experience to bear in the trial arguments throughout the series, but the stories inconsistently deliver the “nitty-gritty” reality of terrorists and terrorism one would expect in a series like this. The Islamics seem more like stereotypes or cliches than real people the reader should be fearful of.

_Defiance_ provides the most suspense in the series: Zack is assigned an NCIS...
agent for protection from terrorists and an American psychopath as he works a highly charged trial, and tries to come to grips with the likelihood of Diane’s death. The series presents an interesting perspective on current political and military issues, and takes the view that while there are peace-loving American Islamics, the basic tenets of Islamic faith and doctrine promote violence and aggression against the United States and Christianity.

Sherri Beeler

HBB 0446531987, 9780446531986, $22.99
248.8/43 xiii, 245 p.; 24 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

In *The Confident Woman*, author Joyce Meyer urges Christian women to live boldly. She dispels stereotypes of subservience and assures women that God wants them to live strong and courageous lives. She reminds readers that God uses both men and women to do mighty things.

"Whether we look at Miriam, Deborah, Esther, and Ruth in the Old Testament, we easily see that God has always used women in ministry."

Meyer also addresses the doctrinal basis for women leading in the church. While some readers will disagree with her interpretation, *The Confident Woman* is a must read for any Christian woman wanting assurance of their value.

Meyer begins by defining confidence in this way:

"I believe confidence is all about being positive concerning what you can do—and not worrying over what you can't do."

The gifts and talents God gives women are as important as those bestowed upon men (and should be used as fearlessly according to Meyer). Confidence, in her opinion, is merely placing one's trust in God's promises and being sure of his presence and direction in one's life.

In the final chapters, Meyer teaches Christian women how to be confident using the "Seven Secrets of a Confident Woman". She pauses throughout these lessons, relating stories of women who have exercised confidence in their own lives. Disclosing her own battle with insecurity, Meyer exposes the enemy of confidence, fear, and the role it plays in hindering women from living fully. *The Confident Woman* speaks to women in a compassionate way, giving them permission to live confidently.

*Alicea Jones*


HBB 1601420811, 9781601420817, $14.99
270.8/3 xii, 194 p.; 18 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

Today the world seems to be open to anything. Religious diversity seems to be the ultimate virtue. The tendency of many in the church is to hide from this change. In *The Disappearance of God*, R. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, responds to the movements which are impacting evangelicalism. He identifies six theological and ecclesiastical trends which have affected the church in recent years: the disappearance of sin, the rejection of hell, the emerging church, open theism, and a decline in church discipline. While each chapter is a warning for the church of today, it is also a response to each of these movements. Mohler's work goes beyond the apologetic and calls Christianity to return its focus to the authority of scripture. Once biblical authority is removed, Christianity inevitably transforms into something else.

While *The Disappearance of God* is informative and is written in a popular style, it is not without problems. First, the text assumes too much of the reader. Mohler attempts to make the above issues accessible to the non-theologian, but the description of each movement is surface level at best. Mohler does not spend enough time with each movement's presupposition to give the reader an appreciation of how the movement works. Next, the work is alarmist. It gives the impression that the above movements are rampantly toppling the church. Granted Mohler is not Chicken Little either, for these movements function more like doctrinal bowling balls then theological acorns. With this in mind *The Disappearance of God* is well worth the read and serves as a nice starting point for a discussion of these issues.

*Monty Self*


PAP 1881273873, 9781881273875, $14.99
248.8/4 245 p.; 23 cm.
Adult Rating: *5

The *Five Love Languages: Singles Edition* is a life-changing book that will bring back healthy, loving relationships to your life. Dr. Gary Chapman uses his *New York Times
bestseller, *The Five Love Languages*, and applies it to singles’ lives. Dr. Chapman teaches that we each have a primary love language, and if others don’t speak our primary love language, then our love tank is not full. The five love languages are words of affirmation, gifts, acts of service, quality time, and physical touch. He tells us how to discover our own love language and also includes a love language profile in the back of the book. These love languages can be applied to relationships with our parents, siblings, children, roommates, coworkers, friends, and dating relationships. He gives five purposes for dating and the purpose and goal of marriage. He also shows how children will respond more positively to discipline if their primary love language is met. If you want others to make a change in their behavior, that person must feel loved and appreciated. Dr. Chapman shares numerous stories and testimonies of how the five love languages changed singles’ relationships.

*The Five Love Languages: Singles Edition* is a must read! Your relationships will improve as you discover your own and others love languages. A study guide in the back allows you to answer questions and apply the languages to your own life. There’s also a worksheet in which to write each family member’s name, their love language, and your response to improve your relationship. This book is easy-to-follow and very practical. We are to be a channel of God’s love, and this framework explains it perfectly.

*Tina M. Cho*

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Spiral PAP 076442646X, 9780764426469, $21.99

220.071 1 v. (unpaged) : ill. (some col.) ; 22 x 35 cm.

Adult Rating: 3

*God’s Good Gifts* has done something quite logical, and that is to take the fellowship and intimacy of a women’s Bible study, and combine it with the fun and activity generated by scrapbooking enthusiasts. Containing devotionals from a variety of authors such as Kay Arthur and Jill Briscoe, among others, the book contains twelve lessons focusing on celebrating the good things God gives us.

Each lesson includes daily Bible readings and questions to meditate upon the week before the Bible study meeting. Each lesson includes “Family Memory Maker” activity suggestions for readers to do with their families, and scrapbooking tips on how to decorate the scrapbook pages for that particular lesson. Although the lessons tend to assume that participants are married with children, they do include suggestions for those who are single, or who no longer have children in their homes.

The group Bible study reading provided for the actual day of the Bible study is quite short, and not all that substantial. However, if participants have done the daily readings and meditations in advance of the study, a skillful leader can derive plenty of substantive material from that, for a deeper discussion.

A leader’s guide provides suggestions for how to organize the group, how much time to allot for each session, how to make people feel comfortable in the group, how to incorporate different types of prayer-time activities, and so on.

Along with the Bible study lessons, the book includes a number of templates and stickers for participants to use in creating their “good gifts” scrapbook, and the book provides sample page layouts and suggestions. This type of scrapbooking is simple enough for the novice, but may be a little too basic or “cutesy” for experienced scrapbookers. However the materials can certainly be adapted by each participant to be as simple or as complex as she wishes to make it.

*Sherri Beeler*

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HBB 1414326815, 9781414326818, $24.99

170/.44 xix, 260 p.; 24 cm.

Adult Rating: 5

*Uncommon*, by Tony Dungy, reads like a book of proverbs for men. He tells it like it is and challenges men to rethink what it really means to be a man.

The book begins with the story of two young men—one black, one white. Although raised quite differently, both are talented and have promising futures. Sadly, both wind up in prison because they made poor decisions.
Dungy introduces *Uncommon* with this story to illustrate how choices made early in life can have profound, even irreversible consequences. He calls men to a higher standard.

Dungy exhorts men to place God and family above all other priorities. As a professional football coach, constantly in the limelight, he knows well the lure and temptation of power and money. He shares his personal experience drafting and coaching young players. He has witnessed the effect of worldliness in the locker room and has a keen understanding of the vices that pull men away from godliness. Although he does not dwell upon his son’s recent suicide, Dungy expresses sensitivity to family and parenting that only comes from such a traumatic experience.

He calls men to seek God’s will—to love and cherish their wives, and to be present for their families. He also admits the challenges men face and the pressures placed upon them by the world. Reason enough, he believes, to walk closely with the Lord.

*Uncommon* is a crusade in ink and paper. True to the author’s persona, *Uncommon* gently calls men of all ages and positions to redefine the world’s version of manliness and to take up the torch of godliness.

Parents will find *Uncommon* an excellent primer, not just for training their sons, but for the daughters who will undoubtedly be impacted, for good or for worse.

*Alicea Jones*

**Wild things : the art of nurturing boys / Stephen James and David Thomas.** LCCN 2008037976. Carol Stream, Ill.: *Tyndale House, 2009.*

PAP 1414322275, 9781414322278, $14.99

248.8/45 351 p ; 21 cm.

Adult Rating: 5

Parents of boys through age 21 can find excellent insights in Stephen James’ and David Thomas’ *Wild Things : The Art of Nurturing Boys.* As family counselors, both authors have plentiful experience and knowledge. They outline the developmental, emotional, physical, and relational patterns boys typically follow, dividing them into preschool, early elementary, tween, teen, and young adult. Readers find much new information about how boys think, why they behave as they do, what they want, fear, prize, and wonder about. The authors then pinpoint areas such as why boys can’t sit still, how their brains function differently from female brains, areas of weakness due to gender, and how a boy wants to and is unable to relate to each parent.

The Hot Topics section at the book’s end spotlights specific areas in which parents often need help in shaping their sons, such as discipline, sex, competition, depression, emotions, single moms, and more.

There is plenty of useful and encouraging information and help in *Wild Things.* Parents will gain a much broader and enlightened view of their sons, their thinking, and their otherwise unfathomable actions, coming away with ideas of how to parent them more effectively and graciously. James and Thomas share many experiences from their counseling work and their own parenting situations; these anecdotes offer authenticity any parent can relate to. Guidelines on how to approach, understand, and guide boys follows each developmental phase, with touches of compassionate humor. Of special help are the final chapters that address specific subjects such as sensitive boys, substance abuse, sexuality, and the value of rite of passage. Parents will see themselves and their kids in this helpful contemporary book. Adults who work with boys of any age will also find much of use.

*Karen Schmidt*
Today a number of publishers are coming out with new editions of Christian classics, many in modern English. Here are three I really enjoy. (Ed.)

*  

PAP 0800794052, 9780800794057, $12.99  
B or 940.53/492/092 269 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.  
Adult (HS) Rating: *5  
The beloved The Hiding Place, by Corrie ten Boom, celebrates its 35th anniversary with a special edition of this true tale of faith, hope, and survival in a Nazi camp. Told in the Sherrills' compelling narrative style, readers encounter the ten Boom family and their efforts to help persecuted Jews in Holland during World War II. When Nazis imprison Corrie and her sister in a concentration camp, we see their struggle to live and to live righteously under inhumane conditions.  

While this book is a tale of faith and God's presence, the horrific nature of the Holocaust makes this unsuitable material for children or young teens. Readers must understand the Nazis' graphic treatment of the family to appreciate fully God's grace at work through the ten Booms' struggles. Therefore, the reader should expect restrained descriptions of abuse, malnourishment, nudity, and violence.  

Readers will appreciate the family genealogy, timeline, and photos in the new edition.  

Jaci Miller

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PAP 0800793013, 9780800793012, $13.99  
HBB 0739419013, 9780739419014, OP; buy used  
B or 266/.0092 255 p. ; 22 cm.  
Adult (HS, mature MS) Rating: *5  
The Christian memoir classic, God's Smuggler by Brother Andrew, also celebrates its 35th anniversary with a re-release of the Dutch missionary's efforts to smuggle Bibles behind the Iron Curtain. The Sherrills' same page-turning prose brings this adventure of faith to life as readers discover how Brother Andrew finds faith in Christ and is led to bring Bibles to believers in persecuted European countries. Multiple close shaves with guards, police, and the KGB demonstrate the power of prayer and the strength of God's protection in this account of how the Lord uses willing followers.  

The book contains some brief descriptions of alcoholism and reckless living, shown to communicate God's grace in bringing Andrew out of his early lifestyle.  

An epilogue in this edition describes Brother Andrew's new endeavors in sharing Christ with the Muslim world.  

Jaci Miller

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PAP 0802456502, 9780802456502, $7.99  
248.3/2 140 p. : 18 cm.  
Adult Rating: 4  
Answers to Prayer, by George Mueller, is a compilation of selections from Mueller's journal as he cares for thousands of orphans over more than 60 years. During this time, he relies only upon the Lord for provision for these children and his other ministries. Mueller decides to discuss his financial needs with no one outside the orphanage in order to depend only upon God. And God delivers in amazing ways.
Modern American readers may find the language of 19th century England challenging to follow and monetary units difficult to understand. The journaled style of the book allows readers to encounter Mueller’s life and faith as he saw them, but the style also means the reader experiences his life from a distance, rather than feeling like an active participant in an unfolding tale. Editorial inserts help identify and clarify key events.

Samples of Mueller’s handwriting, appendices of his doctrinal thoughts, and a follow-up series of questions round out the collection.

These three books provide a sampling of some of the most powerful stories in Christian nonfiction and offer keen glimpses into the goodness and grace of the God residing at the heart of each.

Jaclyn S. Miller
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