Great Pet Books for Kids and Their Parents
Science Project Books for YAs
Lots of Nonfiction Books for Elementary Children and Teens
Fiction for All Ages, Well Worth a Read
Dear Readers,

This double issue has been fun to put together. Holiday books, theme books on pets and science projects, and lots of kids’ books in general. We hope you find it helpful in collection development. Our next issue will be February 2010.

As I continue to work with librarians overseas in mission libraries, I’m amazed at the wide variety of books that find their way to these third world countries. The K-12 MK school in Maputo, Mozambique, has a broad collection, and with constant donations, is becoming more and more up to date. New librarians trained to catalog and succeeding encourage me to continue with this work. What a blessing to see what God can do.

If you are a librarian, proficient in cataloging, and also in another language, you are invited to join in this long distance work. The MK schools tend to have only a few books in the local languages, but Bible schools and seminaries have many. Right now I could use help with books in French and Portuguese. Interested? The library catalogs are online, so distance cataloging is possible.

I pray your holidays are a blessing to you, your library, and your family

In Christ’s love,

Nancy L. Hesch
Editor and Publisher
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Published in the U.S.A. © 2009
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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Max and the Dumb Flower Picture / Martha Alexander; illustrated by Martha Alexander and James Rumford. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, c2009.  

HBB: 158089156X, 9781580891561 $9.95  
E  1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 19 cm.  
PRI Rating: 5

In Max and the Dumb Flower Picture by Martha Alexander young Max doesn't want to color the flower picture Miss Tilley gave him. While other students color their pictures for a Mother's Day gift the way Miss Tilley asked, Max pouts and sulks. He runs out to the playground with his picture and hides in the bushes. Can't he decorate the picture his own way?

Martha Alexander encourages individuality and creative expression. She left sketches for this book with James Rumford to complete before she passed away. He manipulated and partially colored sketches digitally. He then printed the work and watercolored the drawings by hand. Their combined unique efforts produced an insightfully collaborative treasure. As a bonus, floral drawings from family, friends, and colleagues are featured on the endpapers.

Alexander shows the reader it is good, sometimes, to color outside the lines.

We highly recommend this book.  

Mary Vee

The Berenstain Bears faithful friends / written by Jan and Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2009. LCCN 2008033883  
PAP: 031071253X, 9780310712534, $3.99

The Berenstain Bears give thanks / written by Jan and Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2009. LCCN 2007042525  
PAP: 0310712513, 9780310712510, $3.99

The Berenstain Bears love their neighbors / written by Jan and Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2009. LCCN 2007042522  
PAP: 0310712491, 9780310712497, $3.99

The Berenstain Bears play a good game / written by Jan and Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2009. LCCN 2008033882  
PAP: 0310712521, 780310712527, $3.99

The Berenstain Bears and the golden rule / created by Stan and Jan Berenstain; written by Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2008. LCCN 2006032494  
PAP: 0310712475, 9780310712473, $3.99

The Berenstain Bears go to Sunday school / created by Stan and Jan Berenstain; written by Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2008. LCCN 2006033951  
PAP: 0310712483, 9780310712480, $3.99

The Berenstain Bears say their prayers / created by Stan and Jan Berenstain; written by Mike Berenstain. (Living lights) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2008. LCCN 2006032497  
PAP: 0310712467, 9780310712466, $3.99

Jan Berenstain and her son Mike carry on the Berenstain Bear tradition in the Living Lights series. This new series of Berenstain Bear titles focuses on connecting Christian values to a child's (or in this case a bear's) everyday life. The same smiling bears, living and working together in Bear Country, live out each story, teaching through
example in the lives of Brother and Sister Bear. Finding themselves in situations that children of today can relate to, the siblings tackle difficult situations such as a new kid in school, bullies, neighbors who are rough around the edges, preconceived ideas about others, etc. The fun, colorful illustrations are filled with the action of the story. Since the personalities and roles of the characters are the same throughout the series, readers already know what to expect in terms of character traits, setting, etc. Consequently, children will immediately enter the story and can concentrate on the lesson which unfolds.

The title page of each book includes a verse from scripture appropriate to title and ends with related discussion questions and activities. Like other books about the Bear family, the Living Lights Berenstain Bear books follow a formula of sorts—with an introduction to the time, place and event; a new person, idea etc., conflict, lesson, and peaceful resolution. Excellent for group discussion in a class or individual dialog with a parent, the questions invoke thoughtful responses; while the activities are just plain fun, and easy to implement.

The Christian values promoted in each book are indicated by their titles—sportsmanship, prayer life, friendship, the perfect love of God, the importance of attending worship, love of neighbor, thanksgiving, and the golden rule. Each title can be read independently and easily be paired with other curriculum to explain the moral for the reader and help children connect that value to their own lives.

Kristine Wildner

* 


HBB: 1400071755, 9781400071753, $9.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 23 cm.
(PS) PRI Rating: *5

God gave us heaven, 1st ed. / by Lisa Tawn Bergren ; art by Laura Bryant. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2008. LCCN 2007050522

HBB: 1400074460, 9781400074464, $10.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 23 cm.
PRI Rating: *5


HBB: 1400074479, 9781400074471, $10.99

The God Gave Us... series, written by Lisa Tawn Bergen with art by Laura J. Bryant consists of five books that tackle issues of faith and life from a young child’s perspective. Each book features Little Cub, a young, inquisitive polar bear and his parents. The artwork consists of realistic paintings that complement the text.

In God Gave Us You, Little Cub asks Mama where he came from. Mama recounts her excitement over her pregnancy and growing belly, always emphasizing how special and loved Little Cub was, even before she was born.

God Gave Us Heaven answers Little Cub’s question to Papa
about what heaven is. Papa patiently answers her questions about what heaven looks like, what we’ll do there, and what will be there. There is a brief, simplified gospel explanation when Little Cub asks how to get to heaven. Papa uses the analogy of a bridge that crosses over a canyon. He says that our bad choices can keep us away from God, so in love, He sent Jesus to be the bridge we can walk across to get to heaven.

In *God Gave Us Love*, Little Cub is fishing with Grandpa where they talk about the challenge of loving others. They also talk about the different kinds of love, including the love between parents, friends, and God’s unconditional love for us.

*God Gave Us Christmas* covers the difference between God and Santa Claus. It doesn’t dismiss Santa, but stresses that God is much more important. Mama and Little Cub set out to find God. They watch the northern lights, with Mama explaining that they’re evidence of God’s work and that Jesus is the Light of the world. They observe a glacier melting, see a bright star, and talk about presents. Throughout, Mama points Little Cub toward Jesus.

In *God Gave Us Two*, Mama is pregnant and Little Cub has lots of questions about how things will be different when the baby arrives. Mama and Papa reassure Little Cub that she will always be loved. They tell her what a big help she can be with the baby and all the things she can teach him or her. In the end, it turns out that Mama had twins.

These books address issues honestly, using age-appropriate language. Parents will find these books very helpful in answering their children’s questions about the topics raised. They make excellent read-alouds for children ages 3-6.

*Amy Simon*

Chicken said, "Cluck!" 1st ed. / by Judyann Ackerman Grant ; pictures by Sue Truesdell. (I can read! My first shared reading) New York: HarperCollins, 2008. LCCN 2001024016

HBB: 0060287233, 9780060287238, $16.99
PAP: 0064442764, 9780064442763, $3.99
E 32 p. : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
PRI (PS) Rating: 5

*Chicken said, “Cluck!”* is an amusing and deceptively simple children’s book, part of the “I Can Read” series. Young children will be interested in Earl and Pearl’s gardening project and they’ll find Chicken’s unwanted efforts to help believable. They’ll enjoy the humor of the interchanges between the children and Chicken. When the author employs a clever plot twist and Chicken finally finds a way to help in the gardening project by ridding the pumpkin patch of destructive grasshoppers, young readers will find the solution fun and satisfying.


Sue Truesdell’s colorful pictures enhance *Chicken said “Cluck!”* Her amusing illustrations brighten every page with winsome and charming scenes that will be familiar to children who live in cities or rural areas. Truesdell’s pictures will enhance Whatever Earl and Pearl do, chicken tries to help. But the children don’t want chicken’s help. They dig, plant, water and weed and shoo Chicken away. That is, until grasshoppers nibble their pumpkin plants. That’s when chicken’s clucking finally proves helpful.

In *Chicken said, “Cluck!”* the author uses simple vocabulary and repetition to tell a story of young gardeners with goals and obstacles young children will be able to understand. Young children will be interested in Earl and Pearl’s gardening project and they’ll find Chicken’s unwanted efforts to help believable. They’ll enjoy the humor of the interchanges between the children and Chicken. When the author employs a clever plot twist and Chicken finally finds a way to help in the gardening project by ridding the pumpkin patch of destructive grasshoppers, young readers will find the solution fun and satisfying.


Sue Truesdell’s colorful pictures enhance *Chicken said “Cluck!”* Her amusing illustrations brighten every page with winsome and charming scenes that will be familiar to children who live in cities or rural areas. Truesdell’s pictures will enhance
beginning readers’ understanding of the story while they master the simple vocabulary of well-chosen words all the way to a bountiful harvest time.

Chick said “Cluck!” employs well-chosen vocabulary, repetition, appealing characters and illustrations with a believable goal and obstacles, and a clever plot twist.

This beginning children’s book will make an enjoyable addition to home, school, and church libraries even when it isn’t pumpkin harvest time.

Connie Walsh Brown


HBB: 0807552739, 9780807552735, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI Rating: 3

Gillian Lobel’s Moonshadow’s Journey addresses the loss of a loved one in this migratory journey. Young Moonshadow snuggles next to Grandfather, waiting for his signal to join the migration. Swarms of swans circle overhead. Moonshadow asks Grandfather when they should leave. He remembers Grandfather’s words about “the warm sun and green fields” many miles to the south. As blustery north winds stir, Grandfather urges the flock to soar high upon the winds and follow him to “a place of great shining waters.” A fierce storm scares Moonshadow, causing him to fall. His parents rescue him with their strong arms. Unfortunately, Grandfather cannot be rescued.

Karin Littlewood’s full-color watercolor paintings captivate reader’s emotions into the tender, young life of Moonshadow on his first migratory journey. From his first attempt to take off, to fighting icy winds that pelt hail at his head, to restful reprieves, the reader is dramatically transported into the Moonshadow’s experience through boldly illustrated works of art. Littlewood’s brushstrokes brilliantly add life to each page and are worthy of honor.

Lobel’s descriptive text reads like an Indian folk tale bringing a unique flavor to this migratory story. Preparation for discussion regarding loss of loved ones is advised.

Mary Vee


HBB: 076145523X, 9780761455233, $17.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI Rating: 4

Ko-hoh’s wildly pecks through his shell. As he waddles out and collapses on the soft nest, he sees his mother and father. In Jonathan London’s Little Swan, readers follow a trumpeter swan family from the birth of their young to winter migration. The trumpeter parents nurture their young, teaching them to feed from the river and to fly a little farther each day. One day, Ko-hoh’s lessons include warding off an attacking bear. His brothers and sisters huddle together, feeling safe while watching their parents protect them from a ravenous bear. After weeks of learning to fly, winter approaches. Ko-hoh spreads his wings and soars up to his position in the “V” formation, honking the family song.

Kristina Rodanas uses colored pencil over watercolor wash to give life to young cygnets and their parents. Rodanas, a former art teacher, demonstrates her love for birds in capturing intricate details of the feathers and body of these stately birds. Sharp, poignant colors splatter pages with energy.

London provides an interesting supplemental page telling additional facts about trumpeter swans.
While classified as fiction, this book leans toward non-fiction by providing more information and less storyline, which can be useful for classrooms. The vocabulary tends to be at a high level for young readers.

Mary Vee

* 


LCCN 2006027611

HBB: 0310713285, 9780310713289, $16.99

E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 24 x 29 cm.

PRI Rating: *5

The Gift of the Christmas Cookie: Sharing the True Meaning of Jesus’ Birth, written by Dandi Daley Mackall and illustrated by Deborah Chabrian, is a delightful, historical fiction picture book about a young boy who finds hope in sharing the love of Christ through a very special cookie. Since Dad hopped a freight train headed out West to find work, Jack and his mom are all alone. Upon arriving home from school one day, Jack can hardly believe the deliciously spicy smell of baking cookies that greets him. Jack’s excitement soon turns to disappointment when he finds that Mom’s baking is for the needy, rather than for him. As she helps Jack cut out manger scene shapes with wooden cookie boards, Mom recounts how their family tradition of sharing Christmas cookies and the story of Jesus’ birth with the needy started. When a hungry stranger joins them for breakfast, Jack begins to understand that the true meaning of Christmas is more about giving than receiving.

Set during the Great Depression Era, Mackall’s story resonates with a spirit of giving that will touch modern readers’ hearts long after Christmas bells cease their seasonal ringing. Light infused colors and gentle shadows depict realistic movement and a mood that enhances the text. Character interactions invite the reader into this warm holiday tale. Chabrian’s full-page watercolor illustrations, rendered in primary hues, lend a festive quality. Scripture quotes are taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version. (Zondervan, 1984) Included is a brief background about the origins of, as well as a simple recipe to make and share, the Christmas Cookie. Highly recommended for quiet sharing one-on-one, as well as read aloud to a group. This book is intended for ages 4-7 (back cover).

Kimberley D. Harris


LCCN 2008300296

HBB: 0758615000, 9780758615008, $13.49

E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.

PRI Rating: 4

This time of year always gets busy. People are coming and going. The day becomes filled with family events, visiting relatives, and lots of food. Often adults are so focused upon what has to be done that they have forgotten the magic of the holiday season. Unlike adults, children still see the magic and feel the excitement. Dandi Daley Mackall captures this feeling in Thank You for Thanksgiving as she poetically illustrates a young boy’s excitement on the day of Thanksgiving. The book retells a young boy’s experience of holiday preparations, the arrival of visitors, the meal, and the anxiety over how to thank God. The climax of the text is the family prayer before the meal. Each member in turn thanks God for something. As the prayers move around the table the boy’s anxiety grows as he tries to decide what he should thank God for in his prayer.

Thank You for Thanksgiving is an excellent picture book to share with a child as Thanksgiving approaches. Mackell captures
the worldview of her target audience and does it in a reparative rhythmic rhyme. The use of this pattern creates tension as the reader approaches the climax. The text becomes alive with the addition of John Walker's illustrations. The pictures give the reader the feeling of actually being present for the holiday. The character's facial expressions are exaggerations which reflect a six-year-old's worldview.

This text is valuable for two reasons. First, it becomes an opportunity for parent and children to experience the joys of the holiday from the child's point of view. Most importantly, it is a reminder that the holiday is more than a family gatherings filled with food. It is a chance to thank God for His grace and mercy.

Monty M. Self

**Harris finds his feet** / Catherine Rayner. Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2008. LCCN 2007032366

HBB: 1561486167, 9781561486168, $16.95
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 27 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

Harris, a very small hare, lies on the dusty desert sand and looks up at his big feet. He wonders why his feet are so huge. In Catherine Rayner's *Harris Finds His Feet*, Harris asks Grandad his big question. In a tender way, Grandad answers, "All hares have big feet." Harris sadly stares at his long clumsy feet. Suddenly, Grandad leaps high into the air. He shows Harris how their big feet are strong for hopping high, digging holes to stay cool, and running fast away from wolves. Harris soon discovers his huge feet will also help him grow up to be strong and fast like Grandad.

Catherine Rayner's pencil drawings with watercolor paints illustrate a big concept for a little hare using simple pictures. Spritetime greens, browns, and purples illuminate Harris' youthful spirit. Each simplistically full-colored page reinforces the importance of big questions in youthful minds.

This book not only illustrates why hares have large feet, but also the importance of being thankful for how God made us, and asking questions.

We recommend this picture book for the curious at heart.

Mary Vee

**Fox walked alone** / Barbara Reid. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman, 2009. LCCN 2008055723

HBB: 0807525480, 9780807525487, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 22 x

Fox lived alone. He woke one day and noticed the sky didn't look right, the air didn't smell right, and animals of all sorts walked through his lair two by two. In Barbara Reid's *Fox Walked Alone*, readers join fox in a quest to discover where all the animals are going. Over the last hill Fox finds, at last, the answer to his question and a beautiful vixen. She smiles at him, turns then races him over the hippopotamus and onto the boat. Barbara Reid, a masterful artist, uses Plasticine, a form of modeling clay, to illustrate her book. Reid first smears background colors on her canvas forming sky and land features. She then rolls and shapes the clay characters layering body parts to give a 3D appearance. Lastly, she adds texture using pencils, combs, and toothbrushes to etch fur, petals, and other surfaces. Her work has won several awards.

Readers interested in learning how to make their own Plasticine art may visit Reid's web site to see free video instruction.

We highly recommend this imaginative, poetic telling of Noah's Ark.

Mary Vee
Me and my dad! / Alison Ritchie ; illustrated by Alison Edgson. Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2008. LCCN 2006025393

HBB: 1561485659, 9781561485659, $16.95
PAP: 0545020646, 9780545020640, $8.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI Rating: *5

Little Bear wakes to his father’s warm breath. Wrapped in his father’s strong arms they set out for a day of adventure tromping through the woods, fleeing bees, twirling in the breeze, dancing with raindrops, and snuggling in a cave during a storm. Little Bear tells about a blissful day when sleepy eyes pop open, curiosity leads to discovering secrets, small appears big, and scary feels safe. Alison Ritchie’s Me and My Dad! kindles warm relationships between fathers and sons.

Alison Edgson’s cozy acrylic paintings complete a warm fire in a fireplace, a comfortable blanket, and a soft lap of a loving guardian. Hues of golden brown, harvest yellow, lime green, and ocean blues softly touch the reader’s heart. Edgson artistically portrayed individual hairs of fur, raindrops on Little Bear’s tongue, and the jubilant dance of a devoted father with his son. Suitable for rainy days, nap times, or any time a hug is needed, Edgson’s paintings will draw readers to open the book again and again.

We highly recommend this #1 New York Times Bestseller picture book for cuddly times.

Mary Vee


HBB: 0811868656, 9780811868655, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 27 cm.
PRI Rating: 3

If I’m right, you must be wrong, right? Wrong. In Duck! Rabbit! by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld, two narrators debate whether the animal on the page is a duck or a rabbit. But they’re both correct. This picture book is a good-natured lesson in appreciating others’ perspectives and looking at life from different angles.

The story walks children through each narrator’s perspective, demonstrating how the animal is indeed both a duck and a rabbit. Simplicity rules the book, both in line art illustration and in text. They may quickly grasp that the creature is both and wonder, “What’s next?” only to be rewarded with verbal wrangling. A surprise ending completes the book, but feels a touch forced. The style is reminiscent of Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus by Mo Willems but lacks Pigeon’s plot tension to keep the reader engaged.

Although the book is a New York Times bestseller, its excellent concept could have been executed better.

Jaclyn S. Miller

All in a day / by Cynthia Rylant ; illustrated by Nikki McClure. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2009. LCCN 2008030527

HBB: 0810983214, 9780810983212, $17.95
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

All in a Day by Cynthia Rylant reminds the reader that each day gives something new that may never be experienced again. Whether the day brings rain or sun, joy or sadness, each person has the opportunity to witness or do something unique. One might remember the saying from Anne of Green Gables, “Today is fresh and new with no mistakes,” while reading this book, causing the reader to see their own situation from a different point of view.

Nikki McClure’s cut paper art appropriately brings a fresh, artistic style to complement this story. She is a self-taught artist.
who opens the vocabulary and explore ways to encourage one another. Heart of a story with lace-like images to draw the reader into the soul of the story. McClure adds simple colors, such as gold and blue, after scanning her work into a computer to enhance and reflect the cut images.

Rylant excels in providing a discussion starter that is sure to enhance a child's.

We highly recommend this book.

Mary Vee


HBB: 081856097, 978081856096, $14.99
E 58 p. : ill. ; 19 cm.
PRI Rating: 4

In this likable early chapter read, well-known poet/author Alice Schertle creates a likable character in Jeremy Bean. Look Out, Jeremy Bean is three small stories which have him solving some big problems. At least they seem big to him. He manages to find solutions, doing so with laughter, charm, and just a wee bit of help from family and friends.

Chronicle Books publishes quality, if not sometimes quirky books for children, and though Look Out, Jeremy Bean might not be quirky, it is certainly quality.

Young readers venturing out on reading their own books will be both challenged and entertained by Schertle’s offering. The black and white soft sketch illustrations by David Slonim definitely add to the appeal of Jeremy’s adventures. And though they aren’t huge problems, they are big enough that every kid can relate. The cover art is a bit misleading with the big, blue somewhat menacing bunny, as this is not a scary book. The art might deceive some readers (and parents) that the contents are frightful, even though the scare is downplayed with a friendly “boo.” A fun change-up from her usual rhyming text style, Schertle proves she can put out the prose as well as the poem in her storytelling abilities.

Pam Webb

* Peace week in Miss Fox's class / by Eileen Spinelli ; illustrated by Anne Kennedy. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman & Co., 2009. LCCN 2008031038

HBB: 080756379X, 9780807563793, $16.99

Miss Fox's class goes green / Eileen Spinelli ; illustrated by Anne Kennedy. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman & Co., 2009. LCCN 2008055693

HBB: 080755166X, 9780807551660, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
PRI Rating: *5

Eileen Spinelli creates a classroom full of child-like animals that learn lively lessons which transfer to their home lives. These cuddly animals think just like small children which adds to the humor of the stories.

In Peace Week in Miss Fox's Class, Miss Fox is tired of her squabbling class. She decides to have Peace Week. The animal children make the rules. Each animal returns home and is put to the test of upholding Peace Week. Squirrel's big sister gets mad when he makes a ruckus throwing nuts. Instead of yelling at her, he remembers Peace Week and throws marshmallows. Each day of the week, Spinelli describes how the animals respond to Peace Week. All of them demonstrate alternative ways of keeping peace rather than the normal fighting and yelling that siblings and friends usually do. At the end of the week, the class shares their results with Miss Fox. They celebrate with a party and decide to make every week Peace Week.

In Miss Fox's Class Goes Green, Miss Fox surprises the students by showing up at school on her bicycle. She announces, “I am
going green.” She explains they must use less stuff, less energy, and less water. The class decides to help. Frog says he can stop taking showers, but Miss Fox says to just take shorter ones. Others volunteer funny ideas to which Miss Fox helps them think “green.” Again the animals return home and must apply their new green thinking. They make wise decisions and even teach their families and friends how to be green. One very applicable idea is to swap toys instead of buying new ones. In the end, the whole school either rides a bike or walks to school, even the principal.

Anne Kennedy painted full-page, charming watercolor illustrations and also used ink and dyes. These books are applicable to students’ lives and can lead into discussions about conflict resolution and helping the earth. Teachers, homeschoolers, and parents can use these books to teach these important concepts in a fun way. Children can even generate their own ideas for each subject.

Tina M. Cho

Emma’s question / Catherine Urdahl ; illustrated by Janine Dawson. Watertown, Ma.: Charlesbridge, 2009. LCCN 2007017185

HBB: 1580891454, 9781580891455, $16.95
PAP: 1580891462, 9781580891462, $7.95

PRI Rating: 5

Emma’s Question by Catherine Urdahl tells the story of a kindergarten girl who has grown accustomed to spending special times with her grandmother. One day Grandma becomes ill and has to go to the hospital. Little Emma wonders...who will be the guest reader in her school, and who will share a bagel with her on Wednesdays? Emma also wonders, but is afraid to ask...is Grandma going to die? Will Emma ask her question when she goes to the hospital?

Janine Dawson’s illustrations are pen, ink, and watercolor using full colors. Her simple drawings produce a homely, personal feeling in each page, bringing to life the true emotions a family would sense during the illness of a loved one.

Urdahl doesn’t sugar coat questions or strong feelings. Instead, she helps the reader explore what each person in a family is experiencing in a similar situation.

We highly recommend this book.

Mary Vee
In Emma Dilemma and the Camping Nanny by Patricia Hermes, nine-year-old Emma is upset because her nanny, Annie, has a new boyfriend, Bo. Annie is spending all of her free time with him, rather than playing with Emma and her siblings. Mom and Daddy plan to take the family camping for the weekend. Emma is overjoyed that they will have Annie all to themselves; that is, until she finds out that Bo has been invited, too. Although she has a hard time accepting Bo’s incursion into the family outing, Emma is excited because her best friend, Luisa, is joining them, as well. At school, Emma plans to team up with Luisa for a talent show routine. When Luisa must stay home from the camping trip and Emma’s talent show team is preempted by Luisa’s new friend, Katie, Emma becomes frustrated and jealous. She plots to rid Annie of Bo’s attentions and Luisa of Katie’s intrusions.

Emma Dilemma and the Camping Nanny is a contemporary fiction chapter book about a young girl who struggles with feelings of loneliness and betrayal and learns an important lesson about forgiveness and acceptance. In this fourth book of the Emma Dilemma series, Hermes weaves a gentle story about relationships and common everyday events, to which elementary readers will readily relate. A former teacher, and mother of five, Hermes infuses Emma’s story with her personal insights into some of the challenges of childhood. Interactions with the family pets, including a dog, cat, and two ferrets, add a homey touch. Plot is easy to follow; chapters are short and contain large font; and language is age appropriate. Recommended for early readers.

Kimberley Harris

Morgy’s Musical Summer is another winner in the Morgy Series by Maggie Lewis. Children who have ever been to or thought about going to summer camp will relate to Morgy MacDougal MacDuff’s dilemma when his parents want to send him to music camp, of all places! His first few letters home are about missing his pets, Dante and Pancake. But Outlook Music Camp turns out to be much more fun than Morgy expects when Clara and Byron, two of his best friends, also go even though they get to be in the marching band and he’s stuck in Junior Orchestra. But there’s a ghost mystery to be solved when Morgy sees soldiers in three-cornered hats carrying guns with bayonets. Could they be “The Lost Band” from the Revolutionary War?

Even a little romance sneaks into the story when Byron falls in love with their music teacher, Ms. Rapontin. Morgy learns a lot about music too. His trumpet skills improve so much that he gets a solo in the Concerto Fabuloso, a great honor for a “promising beginner.” Young readers will learn that it’s normal to be anxious about doing new things or going to unfamiliar places, but under Mom and Dad’s guidance they could turn out to be wonderful experiences. This contemporary fiction is clearly written with appropriate language for young readers.

Michael Chesworth’s black and white, pen and ink drawings bring the characters and their antics to life and illustrate the camp setting as a great complement to the story.

HBB: 0618927999, 9780618927999, $16.00
PAP: 0547248970, 9780547248974, $6.99
Fic 202 p. : maps ; 22 cm.
INT Rating: 4

Back in the 1950’s, everybody in Maggie’s family is a baseball fan. Dad loves the Yankees but Maggie-O and her brother Joey-Mick root for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Maggie doesn’t actually play but she knows the game: players’ stats, complicated plays, she understands it all. And when her fireman friend, Jim, teaches her to do the intricate scoring that an official scorer might do, Maggie takes to it like a fish to water.

But the Dodgers continue to lose, season after season, despite Maggie’s prayers and support. As if that isn’t bad enough, her friend and mentor Jim, serving in the army in Korea, has stopped writing. The suspense of not knowing what has happened to him is killing her. Will anything that she does ever make a difference—for her favorite team and for her friend, Jim?

Keeping Score is a well written and thoughtful book about a young girl who really cares about her world. This is a story of family dynamics set in a time when life seemed a little more carefree. The author has done a very good job of setting the scene for us and making the story believable.

Ceil Carey


HBB: 0375855602, 9780375855603, $16.99
PAP: 0375855610, 9780375855610, $6.99
Fic 242 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
INT, MS Rating: 5

In Laurel Snyder’s second middle-grade novel, Any Which Wall, long-time friends Henry, Roy, Susan, and Emma are out of school for the summer and bored, bored, bored in their sleepy little town, until, hidden in an Iowa cornfield, they discover a mysterious wall—and an even more mysterious key. They soon find themselves traveling far and wide, having adventures and learning that magic just might look a little different from what they thought.

Written as a tribute to Edgar Eager and E. Nesbit, this Junior Library Guild Selection by master storyteller Laurel Snyder is lyrical, nostalgic, classic, and timeless. Told by a fun, spunky narrator and peppered with delightful illustrations by LeUyen Pham, Any Which Wall veritably begs to be read aloud.

Fun, fast-paced, and fantastical with characters to love. These kids aren’t singlehandedly battling evil. They don’t hold the world’s fate in their hands. They’re regular kids who remember what friendship is about and who create a little magic of their own. They remind the reader to slow down, to enjoy life’s ordinariness, and to always, always keep their eyes and imagination open. Magic still happens. A valuable lesson indeed.

Cheri Williams
The kid’s book of weather forecasting / by Mark Breen and Kathleen Friestad
HBB: 0824968220, 9780824968229, $16.99
PAP: 0824968239, 9780824968236, $12.99
551.63 iv, 140 p. : ill., maps ; 22 x 28 cm.
MS (INT) Rating: 4

Weather is part of the earth science curriculum at both the middle school and intermediate levels. The Kid’s Book of Weather Forecasting is useful for homeschoolers, classroom teachers, or students who want more information on the topic. Author Mark Breen is a meteorologist and uses his training and experiences to write a book which will explain weather forecasting to interested students and the adults who work with them. The chapters in the book cover: weather in general, the atmosphere, the sun, wind, water, clouds, wild weather, and forecasting. The book closes with additional resources and an index.

Breen and Friestad include historical tidbits about the weather throughout the book. One of these tidbits does not agree with some research the reviewer has read. The authors claim that Greenland was named Greenland to entice settlers to come to a country of icebergs that the country never was green. Some research shows that there was a Medieval Warming Period during which time Greenland had forests and supported sustainable agriculture.

The book has many useful aspects. Projects throughout the book show readers how to create simple weather forecasting instruments. There are also situations in which readers can practice the weather predicting skills they have learned. The “Ask Mark” sections spread throughout the book allow readers to get a close-up view of what life as a meteorologist involves. Breen and Friestad include an overview of all weather types which occur in the United States, giving students knowledge of the weather they see in their community as well as weather their community may never experience.

Jane Mouttet

Phillis’s big test / written by Catherine Clinton ; illustrated by Sean Qualls
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. LCCN 2007013241
HBB: 0618737391, 9780618737390, $16.00
B or 811/.1 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI Rating: 4

Phillis’s Big Test by Catherine Clinton tells the courageous story of Phillis Wheatley and her pursuits to have her poetry published. While this is a difficult endeavor for any writer, Phillis’s pursuits came during the time of slavery in the United States. Taken from her homeland in Africa, this young girl became the slave of John and Susanna Wheatley. They named her Phillis and treated her with unusual kindness by providing an education and encouragement to hone her writing skills. Unbelieving scholars of the day wanted to test Phillis to insure the great poetry they read actually belonged to her.

Sean Quall’s acrylic paintings and paper collage illustrations invite young readers and student listeners to learn more about this passionate writer and to cheer her on to success. His work is worthy of an award for capturing the theme of this story.

Clinton includes an epilogue to satisfy the readers’ need to know if Phillis’s poems became published.

This book could be used for Black History month.

Mary Vee

PAP: 1426304757, 9781426304750, $7.95
551.42/4 31 p. : col. ill. ; 24 x 28 cm.
PRI Rating: 5
Coral Reefs by Sylvia Earle and illustrated by Bonnie Matthews is part of the Jump into Science series published by National Geographic. Coral Reefs introduces the coral animals and their skeletons that form the reefs, as well as the fish and other creatures that live in the reefs. Sylvia Earle also talks about the importance of coral reefs in protecting ocean shores and keeping the oceans clean. She addresses the significance of protecting reefs from pollution. There is one mention about coral reefs having been around for millions of years. Included is a simple experiment to illustrate “filter feeders,” one kind of reef dwelling animal.

There are many labeled illustrations of the various animals discussed. The book is informative, yet written in a descriptive style that children will easily understand. The illustrations are realistic water color paintings that children will find colorful and attractive. The “look” of the illustrations adds to the feeling of being underwater. The words of the text are still easy to read in spite of the colorfulness of the pages. There is a map of the world included showing where coral reefs are commonly found.

This book would be helpful to read before visiting an aquarium where children could see animals in real life. It will give them a good basic understanding of the animals involved and how to identify them. Coral Reefs is intended for ages 4-8 (publisher), and is best suited as a read aloud to children that age.

Amy Simon

HBB: 0823412261, 9780823412266, $17.95
PAP: 0823413357, 9780823413355, $6.95
636.7 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
PRI (INT) Rating: 3

HBB: 0618507671, 9780618507672, $16.00
636.7 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI (INT) Rating: 4

Gail Gibbons has created the book Dogs to serve as a teaching tool for a wide variety of subjects related to the most common domesticated animal. Beginning with a brief history of how dogs became domesticated animals, and covering basic vocabulary related to types of dogs and their basic body structure, Gail Gibbons’ book could easily be used to supplement a science lesson or to teach elementary research skills. Although very truncated, the book also contains basic instructions for caring for dogs, basic anatomical features common to all dogs and even some abstract historical information on a few “famous” dogs.

Dogs contain illustrations that appear to be childlike sketches. Children will probably be able to relate to the pictures as they are not dissimilar to something children would be able to create themselves. The flow of the information isn’t entirely organized, and at some points seems to jump from one topic to another that is totally unrelated. For instance, there is a two-page spread of basic care instructions followed by two pages that pick back up with the author’s narrative continuing to tell another aspect of dogs and how they are used in functional ways like shepherding, police work, or leading the blind. It would have made more sense for the chart-type information to be included at the end of the book rather than interrupting the narrative itself.

There is reference to time periods of fifty million and fifteen thousand years as well as crude cave-man illustrations. The information contained within the book is very basic, and while it reveals some introductory information about breeding, children might not find this very interesting. This book is meant as a teaching tool rather than one useful for entertainment.
Dogs and Cats is a unique two-in-one hardcover book featuring both dogs and cats. Each half of the book gives great detail about the life of each animal, and when the reader reaches the middle of the book, they simply have to turn the book over and go back to the opposite cover to begin reading about the other animal. This book would provide good teaching material to older preschool and young elementary school students, and could possibly provide rudimentary book-report material for older elementary school children. It focuses primarily on how each animal became a domesticated pet and gives great detail about each animal’s behavior and hunting skills.

Dogs and Cats is written from an evolutionist’s point of view and develops thoughts about each animal as they developed from their ancestors tens and hundreds of thousands of years ago. The housecat originally began as an African wildcat, and the dog became domesticated after thousands of generations of wolves were killed for their aggressive behavior. Both animals were eventually domesticated for their helpful hunting and protective qualities, and eventually were bred for their looks and their unique behavioral features. Today, of course, both animals are cross-bred to produce animals for specific purposes, and both animals have remained highly valued for their companionship and helpfulness for many, many years.

Dogs and Cats provides basic and interesting information about each animal, and the author cleverly ends each side of the book by asking the question of “Friends or enemies?” and featuring both animals in a picture together at the point where the reader must flip the book over. This book would be appropriate for teaching basic features of each animal and providing opportunities to discuss the behaviors that are unique to these two domesticated animals.

Dogs and Cats is a much more informative book than Gail Gibbons’ Dogs, but both books are basically rudimentary teaching tools for primary aged children. Both books contain very crude picture drawings of the animals that would appeal to young children, and the language used in both books can be easily understood.

Kim Ford

*5

Alexander Hamilton: young statesman / written by Helen Boyd Higgins; illustrated by Cathy Morrison. (Young patriots series; 14) Carmel, Ind.: Patria Press, 2008. LCCN 2007035676

HBB: 1882859618, 9781882859610, $15.95
PAP: 1882859626, 9781882859627, $9.95
B or 973.2/6 116 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.
INT Rating: 5

Alexander Hamilton begins in 1765 with eight-year-old Alec living a carefree boyhood with his mother and uncle on the Caribbean island of St. Croix. His uncle offers to send Alexander to school if he will overcome his fear of horses so he can work the sugar plantation and ride to the schoolmaster’s house. Conquering fear to reach a goal is one of the earliest lessons he learned. However, taming his volcanic temper challenges Alexander throughout his life.

Alexander dreams of attending college in the American Colonies. He finds work at the largest warehouse on the island at the age of thirteen. Other employees sabotage his efforts, but his personality and business prowess change their attitude. When he turns sixteen, the owner offers him a full partnership in the business. Ambition and a strong work ethic distinguish young Alexander Hamilton long before his immigration to America to become one of the Founding Fathers of the new nation.

Helen Boyd Higgins paints a portrait of a boy whose perseverance and determination drive him to overcome any obstacle that blocks his progress. His confidence in his ability to master any task is based on solid experience. She allows us to see that no limits need to be imposed because of age or cultural limitations. Those who dare to follow their dreams may have an astounding impact on history.

Mrs. Higgins’ charming rendition of Alexander Hamilton’s youth allows the reader to identify with one of early America’s most interesting patriots. She includes back-of-the-book sections: What Happened Next; Fun Facts about Alexander Hamilton; a time line of when he lived, and a vocabulary list of unfamiliar words with definitions that include the page reference.

Intricate charcoal drawings by Cathy Morrison illustrate each chapter and help the reader visualize the period and the geographic location.

Deborah Rabern


HBB: 0761455248, 9780761455240, $17.99
E or 623.82 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 23 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

Patricia Hubbell’s Boats: Speeding! Sailing! Cruising explores ship vocabulary using amusing rhyming phrases. Any age primary reader will benefit from words as simple as “boat” to less familiar words like “ply”. Each term appears in context with picture descriptors. This introductory book to boats focuses on showing the differences between a dory and a dinghy, kayak and catamaran, a navy cruiser and battleship, and many other types of boats, in addition to teaching boat terms like fore, aft, mizzenmast, and jiggermast.

Halsey and Addy use various forms of art such as oil and acrylic paints, vintage clip art, hand drawn images, and various old papers to best illustrate each concept. Personified fish add a humorous touch that beckons readers to keep turning pages. Some pages present information horizontally, some pages let the reader to turn the book sideways to see vertical information.

We highly recommend this book for information and entertainment.

Mary Vee

PAP: 1557255954, 9781557255952, $16.99

248.3/2 38 p. : col. ill. ; 26 cm.

INT (MS) Rating: 4

See combined review of this title plus two others under Adult Nonfiction.


HBB: 1590785126, 9781590785126, $16.95

595.7 32 p. : col. ill., col. map ; 21 x 26 cm.

PRI Rating: 4

Insects: Biggest! Littlest! by Sandra Markle, a former elementary school science teacher, provides a close-up look at the world of insects, covering a variety of winged flyers to creepy crawlers. Markle highlights the most interesting facets of the insects, connecting their characteristics to how these help or hinder the creatures.

Beautiful photographs illumine the text while labels pinpoint key anatomical features. The book explains dimensions and vocabulary in clear, concrete language. A glossary with pronunciations, a reference list of books and websites for further exploration, and a global map of insect habitats comprise the end matter.

The vast majority of bugs discussed live in North America and the Pacific; the rest of the world is largely neglected. It seems a shame not to educate children on animal life outside the range of their immediate realities. However, one could argue the value of presenting creatures that children might actually encounter in their lifetimes.

Little explorers and nature lovers will value this book as a rare peek into a tiny world.

Jaclyn S. Miller


HBB: 1590785134, 9781590785133, $16.95

597.3 32 p. : col. ill., col. map ; 21 x 26 cm.

PRI Rating: 4

Children will step into the strange, fascinating world of the shark in Sharks: Biggest! Littlest! by Sandra Markle. Readers witness the birth of a shark, a cage diver facing a Great White, and a live dolphin with a small shark bite. They will also examine several types of shark teeth and discover a brief piece of shark ancestry.

Simple language describes well-known sharks like the Hammerhead, more obscure ones like the Ornate Wobbegong, how (and what) they eat, how they hunt, parts of their anatomy.

Since sharks are primarily eating machines, the book contains a few shots of intimidating teeth. Both the author and illustrator handle the subjects with careful honesty and these shots should pose no issue to most readers.

In the same style as the Insects book in the Biggest! Littlest! series, Sharks offers colorful photographs as well as a glossary with pronunciations, a reference list, and a global map of habitats.

A well-done book that will enlighten ocean lovers.

Jaclyn S. Miller

Away in a manger / illustrated by Mike Jaroszko ; [verses 1 and 2, written by unknown ; verse 3 written by John Thomas McFarland].  St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Pub. House, 2008.  LCCN 2009278050

HBB: 0758614969, 9780758614964, $13.49

232.92 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 27 cm.

PRI Rating:
Mike Jaroszko’s illustrated version of *Away in the Manger* walks the reader through visual imagery of the famous Christmas carol by the same name. Jaroszko knits together scenes from the night of Jesus’ birth including Mary, Joseph, and animals in the stable with modern day scenes of children and their families celebrating Christ’s birth. Enhanced with a traditional flair, this unique presentation offers a warm invitation to revisit the importance of celebrating Jesus’ birthday.

Mike Jaroszko’s oil paintings portray a true-life rendition of Jesus. The baby gazes at his mother, is entranced by cows, and amused with sheep. Jaroszko tenderly paints Mary as a young woman holding her first child. He illustrates animals showing minute detail and accuracy. Brilliant colors show Christmas happiness on the faces of traditionally dressed children.

We highly recommend this warm presentation of *Away in the Manger*.

*Mary Vee*

*Open the Door to Liberty!* By Anne Rockwell is a biography of Toussaint L’Ouverture. Few know of this powerful revolution that rocked Haiti in the early 1800’s. Slaves brought from Africa toiled on sugar cane plantations owned by French colonists. Led by Toussaint, the slaves rebelled against the white owners and took over the island. Later Toussaint, a former slave himself, was captured by Napoleon’s soldiers and taken to France where he died. R. Gregory Christie’s gouache paintings on Strathmore illustration board are bold and reflect the anger and discontent of the uprising. Distortions in the illustrations cause the reader to identify, at least somewhat, with the difficulties experienced by Toussaint.

Rockwell shares the summary of a complex revolution in this sixty-four-page book. She provides a bibliography for readers interested in learning more about this Haitian revolution.

Because of the hardships discussed in the book, it is not suggested for children younger than intermediate age. This book could be used for Black History month.

*Mary Vee*


Coretta Scott is a picture book that uses poetry and paintings to chronicle the life of the wife of Martin Luther King, Jr. Poet Ntozake Shange starts the book with Coretta and her siblings walking five miles to the nearest colored school. Her youth is covered briefly, then her marriage to Martin. The book addresses the Montgomery bus boycott, sit ins, marches, and the Million Man March in Washington, DC. There is a one page historical description of Coretta Scott’s life in the back which helps to clarify some of the history discussed in the poetry.

The paintings are beautiful, colorful, and expressive. They are an impressive work of art by themselves. The rich colors and detailed depictions of the characters’ faces make the artwork appealing. The art complements the story and aids its communication. The poetry is free form and does not rhyme, but shows the feelings of the
characters.

*Coretta Scott* alone would be incomplete as a history of the times it portrays. Readers would need a basic understanding of the situations covered, such as the marches and boycotts, in order to get the most out of the book. It would be most useful read after a study of the facts of the era. It might also work as a teaser to get students curious and interested in the time period, to be followed by further study. Although it is the story of African-Americans in this country and their struggle for freedom, I believe other students would learn from the book and gain sympathy for what others have been through.

*Coretta Scott* would be best as a read aloud for ages 4-9 (publisher).

*Amy Simon*

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HBB: 0758614985, 9780758614988, $13.49

232.92 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.

PRI Rating: 5

*Fear Not, Joseph* is a picture book written in the first person point of view from Joseph’s perspective. Author Julie Stiegemeyer begins with Mary and Joseph engaged and Mary telling Joseph about her dream and the pregnancy. Joseph plans to divorce her until the angel appears to him. The book covers the journey to Bethlehem, Jesus’ birth, and ends as they escape to Egypt. Because it is written solely from Joseph’s perspective, there is no mention of the shepherds rejoicing or the eastern star.

Cheri Bladholm’s art consists of realistic, beautiful color paintings that compliment the story. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are depicted with accurate Middle Eastern skin color, hair color and dress.

The book does a very nice job of capturing how Joseph may have felt while still remaining true to Scripture and understandable to a young child. The angel’s admonition for Joseph to “Fear not” is repeated several times in the book as Joseph encounters difficult situations, such as the when they had to travel to Bethlehem and the realization that the baby would be born in the stable.

The story’s end feels very abrupt. I turned the page and was quite surprised that it was over. A better conclusion would have been helpful.

This book makes an excellent read aloud for children ages 5-9 (publisher). It will help young readers better understand the Christmas story from Joseph’s perspective.

*Amy Simon*
Small Pets: Books for Young Children
by Tina M. Cho

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My first guinea pig and other small pets / Linda Bozzo. (My first pet library from the American Humane Association) Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Elementary, 2008. LCCN 2006014970

LIB: 076602752X, 9780766027527, $22.60
636.088/7 32 p. : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
PRI (PS) Rating: *5

My First Guinea Pig and Other Small Pets is a fantastic book for young children as they consider buying their first pet. Linda Bozzo begins by giving suggestions for different kinds of small pets and places to buy them. She also gives five tips in selecting a healthy animal such as, “The eyes should look clear.” Then she lists items each pet will need. Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, rabbits, ferrets, rats, and mice are the featured small pets in this book. Two pages of information are dedicated to each animal. Bozzo tells whether the animal prefers to live alone or with a companion, explains the type of cage to set up, food to buy, and how to keep the pet looking great. The end of the book describes things you can do to keep your pet healthy.

My First Guinea Pig and Other Small Pets is easy-to-read with colorful photographs of adorable animals. The table of contents shows that the book is divided into eleven short sections. Each small section has a title such as “What Will My New Pet Need?” and information presented on a clean, white page. Words to know, other books, web sites, and an index are found in the back of the book. This book is part of the My First Pet Library from the American Humane Association Series by Enslow. My First Guinea Pig and Other Small Pets is recommended as a great first book about a variety of pets if your child is wondering which pet would be best.


LIB: 076602749X, 9780766027497, $22.60
636.6 32 p. : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
PRI (PS) Rating: 5

My First Bird is a wonderful first book for young children as they consider buying a bird. Linda Bozzo describes the different birds available for children to choose from. She also emphasizes the importance of selecting an alert bird. Cages, perches, toys, and feeders are items to buy for this pet. She also tells about safe places to put the bird cage in your home. There are sections about food and how to clean the bird and the cage. Last, Bozzo lists signs of a sick bird.

My First Bird is a very helpful book for young children. The table of contents shows the book is divided into ten small sections. Colorful photographs accompany each page. This book has an easy-to-read format and lay-out. Words to know, other books, web sites, and an index are found in the back of the book. This book is part of the My First Pet Library from the American Humane Association Series by Enslow. My First Bird is recommended for young children who are buying a bird.

Caring for your hamster / by Adele Richardson. (First facts. Positively pets.) Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2007. LCCN 2005035852

HBB: 0736863877, 9780736863872, $15.99
636.9/356 24 p. : col. ill. ; 21 cm.
PRI Rating: 3

Caring for Your Hamster is an informative book for the youngest kids who want to buy a hamster.
Adele Richardson tells which kinds of supplies to buy and how hamsters stay busy with their toys. She explains how your hamster can get to know you so that you can eventually pick it up. Feeding the hamster, cleaning it, and keeping it healthy and safe are other sections in this book. Richardson also notes that hamsters are rodents and need to chew on things to keep their teeth short. Lastly, four behaviors of your hamster are listed and the interpretation of each.

*Caring for Your Hamster* is part of the Positively Pets Series from Capstone Press. This little book has a good deal of information presented in a simple format with large, colorful photographs. The table of contents shows that the book is divided into ten small sections. A glossary, other books, internet sites, and an index are found in the back of the book. *Caring for Your Hamster* is an ideal book for preschoolers through second grade who know they are buying a hamster.


HBB: 0823414868, 9780823414864, $17.95
PAP: 0823416607, 9780823416608, $6.95
636.9/32 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.

PRI Rating: 3

*Rabbits, Rabbits, and More Rabbits!* is an information-packed book for young children. Throughout the book Gail Gibbons explains the difference between wild and tame rabbits. Each page is loaded with interesting facts such as how fast a rabbit can run, its actions during danger, its super senses, where it lives in the wild, and how it takes care of its babies. Most of the book is about wild rabbits and their life. In the last few pages Gibbons gives information about how to take care of a pet rabbit indoors and outdoors. One concern of this book is evolution. The beginning pages state that rabbits lived 65 million years ago, and that the oldest rabbit fossils are 37 million years old.

Water-color and ink illustrations fill each page and accentuate the facts presented. Some illustrations present a diagram or label to help understanding. The strength of this book lies in the information accessible to students, which they can use in reports. A table of contents and page subtitles would have been helpful to locate facts quickly. This book is only recommended for its facts, not for choosing a pet.

*Hamsters and gerbils* / by Carol Ellis. (Great pets) New York: Benchmark Books, 2009. LCCN 2008024336

LIB: 0761429999, 9780761429999, $29.93
636.935/6 46 p. : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
INT (PRI) Rating: 5

*Hamsters and Gerbils* is a well-organized chapter book for older students, ages 9-12. The first chapter explains how hamsters and gerbils became domesticated. Carol Ellis tells the story about a scientist and professor in Israel who traveled to Syria in 1930 to locate hamsters for research. Chapter two describes the differences between hamsters and gerbils and gives facts about each. Ellis gives specific details about choosing the right pet. Chapter three gives information about different types of hamsters and gerbils along with where they originated in the world. Chapter four is jam-packed with information on how to care for your hamster or gerbil at home.

Beautiful, color photographs accompany each page. Each chapter is divided with subtitles. A glossary, list of extra books, web sites, and an index are found in the back. *Hamsters and Gerbils* is a wonderful read for older children who want to buy a new pet or who are writing a report. This book is part of the Great Pets Series from Marshall Cavendish.

If a library could choose only one of these titles reviewed above we recommend *My First Guinea Pig and Other Small Pets* because it gives an overview of many small pets. If a library could purchase two titles from these reviewed we recommend adding *My First Bird*, which gives information on a species not listed in the previous book. If after purchasing the above titles a library was interested in purchasing additional titles, we recommend pursuing different titles that perhaps focused on a specific pet, perhaps from the Great Pets Series from Marshall Cavendish. This series gives you the most information for your money.
The truth about Truman School / Dori Hillestad Butler.  Morton Grove, Ill.:  Albert Whitman, 2008.  LCCN 2007029977

HBB: 0807580953, 9780807580967, $15.99
PAP: 0807580961, 9780807580967, $7.99
Fic 170 p.: ill. : 21 cm.

MS Rating: 5

A frustrated eighth-grade journalist starts a website with her best friend in The Truth About Truman School. Zeby Bower, default editor-in-chief of the Truman Bugle, butts heads with the faculty advisor's insistence on administration-approved articles. Longing for journalistic integrity, Zeby quits the school paper and plans to start an underground, uncensored publication. Her best friend suggests a website as the perfect venue. Within days, www.truthabouttruman.com is online. Anyone can contribute without censorship.

A poll to name the worst teacher at Truman starts to drive traffic. The two friends exult over the chain reaction throughout the school as more hits and posts are added. A volunteer cheerleading squad and a budding comic book creator take the challenge to submit. The website is a success.

An unflattering three-year-old picture is posted of the popular Lilly along with the question, who's the worst poser. Although it isn't nice, the photo is real. It stays. So begins an escalating case of cyber-bullying.

The trials and tribulations of middle-school are well-documented by Dori Hillestad Butler in this timely novel that looks at popularity and how anonymous bullying burgeons into a feeding frenzy. Although Zeby's point of view is central, the reader is given insight into the heads of Amr, Lilly, Brianna, Hayley, Trevor, and Anonymous. Ms. Butler's technique is a model of clarity. She uses headings of a bold icon with the name of the character and the first person stream of consciousness in the text below.

Questions of empathy, moral responsibility, freedom of speech, and censorship are considered as some of the students are challenged and changed by the consequences of bullying. This book is a great launching pad for open dialog to discuss these crucial issues. Teachers and parents would do well to encourage their students to read The Truth About Truman School.

Deborah Rabern


HBB: 0761455353, 9780761455356, $16.99
Fic 242 p.: 22 cm.

HS Rating: 3

Essie is only sixteen but juggles the responsibilities of an older woman as she fights to hold her family together on the East Side of New York City. Her work at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, with its fourteen hour shifts, leaves little room for much else, but in stolen moments she creates beautiful dresses and hats for her little sister. Early in Jacqueline Davies' novel, Lost, which is told in alternating chapters, it becomes evident that Essie is an unreliable narrator of her own story. Some horrible, unnamed event looms over her and she fights to push awareness of it aside. A budding friendship with the mysterious Harriet Abbot, a girl whose lovely clothing and manners make it clear she doesn't belong in a sweatshop, provides distraction from the anguish, but then the fire bells ring and catastrophe strikes once again.

In her novel, Davies ties together two events of note that occurred in 1911: the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, in which 147 girls died, and the disappearance of Dorothy Arnold, a twenty-five-year old heiress who disappeared while walking down the street. Lost gives readers an introduction to the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, but the novel more truly revolves around Essie's battle to come to terms with a great loss. Her mental condition is revealed gradually, and this, plus the
abrupt switches between chapters, may prove difficult for some readers to follow. Childbirth and menstruation are depicted as miserable events in a woman’s life, and there are a few passages with mild profanity. The concept of free will fascinates Essie and the idea of “a person deciding for himself how his life is going to be ... not just sitting around waiting for God to make things better” appeals to her. Davies wraps up her tragedy filled novel a bit too neatly for belief, but young readers will find here an avenue through with to explore the worst workplace disaster in New York City prior to September 11, 2001.

*Lillian Heytvelt

Helen Frost’s *Crossing Stones* presents the paradox of a nation fighting for democracy abroad while denying the vote for half its own citizenry during World War I. Eighteen-year-old Muriel and her brother Ollie Jorgensen live just across the creek from their closest friends, Frank and Emma Norman. The story takes place over nine months, during which Frank and Ollie enlist and fight overseas, and Muriel travels to Washington D.C. to help her suffragist aunt return to her home in Chicago after having been imprisoned for demonstrating outside the White House. The characters each make their own way through the suffering of war, the deadly flu epidemic and the belief that it was unwomanly and unpatriotic to support the Nineteenth Amendment to our Constitution. Muriel’s courage shines through in asking tough questions, finding her own answers, refusing to accept the unacceptable, and following her heart. The novel culminates with the hope of rebirth for the survivors, their families and the nation.

Frost does with language what Michelangelo did with marble. She recognizes the true story and strips away all unnecessary words to sculpt a poetic novel of epic proportion in three voices. Emma and Ollie speak in “cupped-hand sonnets” with a subtle rhyming form that both connects them and resonates with the reader. Muriel’s voice is free verse, flowing down the pages, making its way through the stone-shaped sonnets. The symbols and imagery bring an emotional depth to this unforgettably moving piece of historical fiction.

**Crossing stones / Helen Frost. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.**

LCCN 2008020755

HBB: 0374316538, 9780374316532, $16.99

Fic 192 p.; 24 cm.

HS (MS Adult) Rating: *5

Helen Frost’s *Crossing Stones* brings together a 12-year-old Australian boy and a young Bangladeshi boy. Adam lives in the Middle Eastern city of Abudai, and Walid dwells on the outskirts of the city, where he’s forced to ride camels in races. When a bomb drops on Abudai and begins a three-day war, Adam and everyone else on his compound flees the city. But when everyone leaves Adam at a gas station, he meets Walid, who’s been abandoned in a desert cave. The two boys both need to return to Abudai, but they possess little food or water, and they can hardly communicate with each other.

While Prue Mason offers a fascinating glimpse into other cultures, she also uses quite a bit of profanity for a book that is likely to appeal mostly to young readers. The book contains about 14 profanities or offensive words and at least nine flippant uses of God or Christ’s name. Furthermore, the epigraph, which accurately defines the

**Camel rider / Prue Mason. 1st U.S. ed. Watertown, Me.: Charlesbridge, 2007.**

LCCN 2006034125

HBB: 1580893155, 9781580893152, $15.95

PAP: 1580893155, 9781580893145, $7.95

Fic 204 p.; 21 cm.

MS Rating: 3, not recommended

**Camel Rider** brings together a 12-year-old Australian boy and a young Bangladeshi boy. Adam lives in the Middle Eastern city of Abudai, and Walid dwells on the outskirts of the city, where he’s forced to ride camels in races. When a bomb drops on Abudai and begins a three-day war, Adam and everyone else on his compound flees the city. But when everyone leaves Adam at a gas station, he meets Walid, who’s been abandoned in a desert cave. The two boys both need to return to Abudai, but they possess little food or water, and they can hardly communicate with each other.
overall message of the book, proclaims that we are all “children of one faith” and that all religions “are fingers of the loving hand of one Supreme Being.”

Adam attempts to help and communicate with a boy who is very different from him. But his blatant disobedience of his parents mars his ability to serve as a role model for the children likely to read Camel Rider.

Rachelle Dawson

Ripple effect / Paul McCusker. (Time thriller trilogy ; 1) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2008. LCCN 2008022161
PAP: 0310714362, 9780310714361, $9.99
Fic 212 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
HS Rating: 5

Out of time / Paul McCusker. (Time thriller trilogy ; 2) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2009. LCCN 2008044638
PAP: 0310714370, 9780310714378, $9.99
Fic 236 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
HS Rating: 5

Memory’s gate / Paul McCusker. (Time thriller trilogy ; 3) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2009. LCCN 2009000826
PAP: 0310714389, 9780310714385, $9.99
Fic 204 p. ; 22 cm.
HS Rating: 5

Paul McCusker’s Time Thriller Trilogy explores the strange happenings in a town called Fawlt Line. According to Elizabeth Forde, Fawlt Line is “like Mayberry trapped in the Twilight Zone.” (Ripple Effect, p. 11) Malcolm Dubbs, uncle and guardian to Elizabeth’s boyfriend, Jeff, thinks Fawlt Line is “actually a fault line into other times and dimensions.” (Memory’s Gate, p. 25) The series creates a world in which, given the right conditions and locations, people can slip into other times or dimensions.

In Ripple Effect, Elizabeth Forde struggles with the embarrassment her parents cause her. After all, having a dad that goes to church with his shirt inside out is more than a girl can bear. She decides to run away and asks Jeff, her lifelong friend who has a car, to run away with her. Before she can run away, she finds herself lost in a different Fawlt Line – in her house, but it’s no longer her house. She finds herself in a town where she is in danger on many levels. Mistaken for another girl named “Sarah”, Elizabeth finds disbelief and pity for her “amnesia” wherever she turns. She begins to wonder if her past really ever existed or if she just made it up.

Out of Time opens with Jeff and Elizabeth on their way to a school dance. On the way to the dance, they encounter a thick bank of fog just outside the historical village Malcolm is constructing. A man on a horse thunders up to their car, almost colliding with them. The man, who only speaks Latin, claims to be King Arthur. Malcolm, Jeff and Arthur must find a way to find and fulfill the purpose of Arthur’s presence – if he really is Arthur - in modern times while keeping him out of a psychiatric facility.

Meanwhile, in England, Pastor Graham Ridley struggles to keep his faith amidst a crumbling church and family. He knows it will take a miracle to save his church from the clutches of superstore development.

Memory’s Gate finds Elizabeth volunteering her time at the Fawlt Line Retirement Center (FLRC). Something seems off though, and Elizabeth really doesn’t want to confront the creepy feeling she faces at the Retirement Center. Resident Frieda Schultz warns her not only about the shallow charm of a young, movie-star handsome worker, but also about one of the residents who “seems evil”. When the FLRC residents go for an outing to Malcolm Dubb’s historical village, the sheriff’s dad, a new resident at FLRC, goes missing. Elizabeth finds that if
she truly wants to help the residents, she may have to conquer her fear and discover what’s going on beneath the surface.

The Time Thriller Trilogy by Paul McCusker develops quickly with gripping tension. The characters endure layers of trouble. For example, disappearing to another world is bad. Being classified as crazy is worse. Learning that people aren’t what they seem, and that there’s a sinister element to the whole scenario is terrifying. Elizabeth and Jeff learn they must rely on their true friends, on the adults in their lives for help, and they must rely on the Lord for guidance. In these fantasy fiction books, McCusker manages to present an explanation of the fantastic with enough logic to make it accessible to the imagination. The settings play a central role to the story as the time transfers only seem to happen in certain areas and lend credence to Elizabeth’s surmise that Fawlt Line is like Mayberry stuck in the Twilight Zone. Not just an exciting read, these books tell stories of teenagers who are developing their faith, eventually respecting the advice of the adults in their lives, and seeking to serve others.

Kristi Wolcott

Morning in a different place / Mary Ann McGuigan. 1st ed. Honesdale, Pa.: Front Street, 2009. LCCN 2007017547

HBB: 1590785517, 9781590785515, $17.95
Fic 195 p.; 22 cm.
MS Rating: 3, not recommended

Mary Ann McGuigan’s Morning in a Different Place takes place in the Bronx in the two months leading up to the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Fiona, an Irish eighth-grader, establishes an unlikely friendship with Yolanda, a black girl whose courage and tenacity she admires and attempts to emulate when Fiona’s mother returns to Fiona’s alcoholic, abusive father. Fiona struggles with her desire for a “normal” family and acceptance with the popular crowd at school as she learns to stand up for her family, her beliefs, and her real friends.

Unfortunately, McGuigan never finds the real story and develops it. Instead, the characters feel flat and inaccessible as they march through a parade of issues—racism, alcoholism, domestic violence, anti-Semitism, abortion, drug dealers—sometimes with the level of insight expected from a teenager, but more often with an adult perspective that resembles a history or social studies lesson. There are moments of clarity and glimpses of truth interspersed throughout the novel, but too often the characters fall in and out of the stereotypes and bigotry of the era. The ideas are there, but they are simply too big for these characters and this plot to carry successfully.

The story contains mild, recurring profanity and includes Fiona becoming intoxicated while drinking a bottle of wine with Yolanda, also an eighth-grader, and a Jewish boy who is a high school freshman.

Laurie A. Gray

* Escape under the forever sky / by Eve Yohalem. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2009. LCCN 2008019565

HBB, 081186653X, 9780811866538, $16.99
Fic 220 p.; 21 cm.
MS HS Adult Rating *5

Escape Under the Forever Sky: a novel by Eve Yohalem is a contemporary jungle survival novel set in the wilds of Africa. Lucy, a precocious 13-year-old, is not overly thrilled when her mother accepts a job as U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia. She is weary of the exotic places and frequent transitions her parents’ professions require. To top it all off, her dad has accepted a position in Indonesia, which means she will only see him, at best, on occasional holidays. Mom’s busy lifestyle and over-protective behavior leaves Lucy lonely and bored. She soon rebels by sneaking out with
friends. While out, Lucy is kidnapped, drugged, bound, and taken to a makeshift hut in the middle of nowhere. She quickly concludes that, if she is to escape, she must rescue herself. Chased by her captors and their killer hounds, Lucy flees into the jungle. She utilizes her knowledge of the local flora, fauna, and wildlife to survive. During her jungle adventure, Lucy makes some unexpected friends and meets a kaleidoscope of birds and other jungle creatures.

Yohalem blends Lucy’s story with the enigmatic landscape, wildlife, and culture of Africa, to form an unforgettable tale about a young girl whose near death experience opens her eyes to the world around her and the value of family and friends. Although minor issues with the book comprise mild obscenities and references to evolutionist theory, also included are multiple references to Biblical history and useful facts about jungle plants and animals indigenous to the region. The writing style of Wayne Thomas Batson is only complimented by his partner, Christopher Hopper, and the reader is immediately drawn into the Elven world of Allyra. Both the present world and the Elves’ domain contain spiritual references that will be immediately recognized, and these points in the story only serve to add urgency to the task of the Elven Sentinels tasked to find and guard the seven Elven Lords. The age of reckoning has come to each of the children, and they are beginning to display the gifts unique to their race. These gifts are desperately needed if the race of Elves is to survive!

Curse of the Spider King is the first in a series entitled The Berinfell Prophecies, and will make an excellent addition to any young adult reading collection. The story includes some fight scenes, but no gross violence or bad language. This novel reads very much like a cross between Lord of the Rings and The Chronicles of Narnia. I highly recommend Curse of the Spider King and eagerly await its sequel!

Kim Ford

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PAP: 0888998856, 9780888998859, $12.95
Fic 263 p.; 22 cm.
MS HS Rating: *5

Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom transports readers into China’s Taiping Rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century. Fifteen-year-old Wang Lee is kidnapped from his peasant family and sold into slavery. His new master Mei Li turns out to be an eighteen-year-old girl whose near death experience opens her eyes to the world around her and the value of family and friends. Although minor issues with the book comprise mild obscenities and references to evolutionist theory, also included are multiple references to Biblical history and useful facts about jungle plants and animals indigenous to the region. The present world and the Elves’ domain contain spiritual references that will be immediately recognized, and these points in the story only serve to add urgency to the task of the Elven Sentinels tasked to find and guard the seven Elven Lords. The age of reckoning has come to each of the children, and they are beginning to display the gifts unique to their race. These gifts are desperately needed if the race of Elves is to survive!

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Kim Ford
old woman dressed as a man who immediately sets him free. He chooses instead to join his rescuer’s Christian rebel group in its mission to overthrow China’s oppressive emperor and spread Christianity throughout the land. Wang Lee moves from ignorance and arrogance toward humility and an acceptance of his own humanity as he trains to become a soldier, experiences the harsh realities of war, and struggles to find his way back home.

Katherine Paterson uses elegant prose and a tale of adventure to explore a foreign culture through universal characters whose underlying hopes and aspirations are recognizably our own. The militant Christian group preaches equality regardless of class or gender and abolishes the crippling custom of binding women’s feet into dainty, pointed hooves. The rebels are known to be kind to the poor, never stealing or pillaging as they march to battle. However, the group resorts to draconian penalties for every infraction, including any violation of the war-time order for strict separation of the sexes. When Wang Lee’s philosopher friend suggests that the enemy soldiers they are killing are not different from themselves, Wang Lee reports this disloyalty and sees his friend beheaded as a traitor.

Wang Lee knows that his friend spoke the truth, though, and struggles with the same questions we still wrestle with today: How can a God of love ordain the killing and destruction that accompanies any war, and who can we trust to hear the voice of God better than our own selves? Originally published in 1983, this historical novel belongs in every young adult library collection.

_Laurie A. Gray_
Clarence Jones : Mr. Radio / Janet & Geoff Benge. (Christian heroes, then & now) Seattle, Wash.: YWAM Pub., 2006. LCCN 2005016637

PAP: 1576583430, 9781576583432, $8.99
B or 278/66 201 p. : ill., maps ;21 cm.
MS Rating:*5

Mary Slessor : forward into Calabar / Janet and Geoff Benge. (Christian heroes, then & now) Seattle, Wash.: YWAM Pub., 1999.
PAP: 1576581489, 9781576581483, $8.99
B or 286/5/092 204 p. : map ;21 cm.
MS Rating:*5

A series which has proved useful and interesting to a wide audience, Christian Heroes: Then & Now provides exciting, true, thought-provoking reading. Each book presents a missionary's physical and spiritual life, problems and accomplishments. The series draws from a wide range of missionaries, from William Carey and Jonathon Goforth to such moderns as Betty Greene of MAF. The format for each book is similar: a flash forward to an exciting event in the protagonist's mission work, then a biography beginning at birth through to death or the most recent exploits. Each book presents the person as real, faults, fun, problems and all, while at the same time showing how God directed the whole life scenario. The mission fields are also presented in this way, with understanding and without bias. Husband and wife team, Janet and Geoff Benge write simply, yet with panache, providing fascinating, challenging material.

Aimed at a wide age range of readers and for Christian schools and home schoolers, this series will be useful in many places, church study groups, families, public schools interested in motivating biographies, those looking for God’s direction in their lives.

Clarence Jones: Mr. Radio
Growing up in a Salvation Army family, Jones learned early about people’s needs. As an adult he gained experience in radio broadcasting in the USA; then felt God calling him to Ecuador where he co-founded Radio HCJB.

Betty Greene: Wings to Serve - Trained as a Navy pilot during WWII, Betty felt called to do something with airplanes for the Lord; not an easy aspiration for a young woman of that era. But from this dream came the Missionary Aviation Fellowship. The reader will thrill to Betty’s exploits flying into inaccessible mission areas.

Sundar Singh: Footprints Over the Mountains - Raised in India by his devout Sikh mother, Sundar searched until he found what satisfied his soul - the Lord Jesus Christ; and, caused even his father to seek Sundar’s death. Sundar Singh lived an unusual Christian life, as he constantly moved on, often barefoot and hungry, to unreached areas of India for the Lord.

Ida Scudder: Healing Bodies, Touching Hearts - The last thing
in the world Ida wanted to do was be a missionary to India like her parents. But, guess what, this very talented, highly trained medical doctor ended up there, making a humble, loving, large Christian imprint on the subcontinent.

Mary Slessor: Forward into Calabar - Think you have nothing to offer the Lord? Read about Mary Slessor who went from being an overworked weaver in an 1800s English factory to the beloved and successful missionary to the natives of Calabar in Africa. They called her Eko Kpukru Owo: The Mother of Us All

Donna Eggett

PAP: 080247294X, 9780802472946, $14.99
248.8/33 201 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.
MS HS Rating: 5
Also available: Companion guide, 0802472915, $13.99. Study guide/journal.
Everyone believes a lie sometimes and occasionally those lies generate an emotional response in us that can cause lifelong problems. In Lies Young Women Believe and the Truth that Sets Them Free, authors Nancy DeMoss and Dannah Cresh help readers recognize the lies that impact how we view ourselves, our world, and our relationships. In the first chapters the authors tackle the definitions of lies and truth. They also provide a good scriptural foundation for understanding the words. There is a mini version of their Blazing Lies Test to help you understand what you believe about truth.

The main body of the book discusses twenty five lies that young women and many young men believe. The chapters cover lies about God, Satan, self, guys, relationships, faith, sin, the media, and lies about the future. The authors begin at the beginning by exposing the lies we believe about God and our relationship to Him. Once those lies are exposed and understood the other lies become so much easier to identify.

This book was written for adolescents. It is colorful and eye catching. The authors share anecdotes from their many group meetings. The pages pop with various fonts and boxes of additional information or stories. It is a format that appeals to young people. The authors expose some hard truths without preaching or talking down to the reader. The book does deal with the sensitive issues of sexuality and relationships. This book would also be valuable to adults working with young people as it gives great insight into thoughts and feelings of today's young women.

Mary McCoy

HBB: 0823420698, 9780823420698, $24.95
B or 973.3/341 xi, 100 p. : ill. (some col.), col. maps ; 24 x 28 cm.
MS (INT) Rating: 4
Washington at Valley Forge depicts the condition of the Continental Army, General George Washington, and the fledgling United States in year three of the Revolutionary War. With soldiers whose supplies will not last the winter, Washington sets up camp at Valley Forge, and throughout the course of the winter, the soldiers forage for food, build wooden huts that protect them from the elements better than their tents, and try to scrape together some semblance of military life. Washington seeks aid from the Continental Congress, but refrains from revealing the extent of the supply crisis. Meanwhile, there is some debate in the Continental Congress regarding whether or not Washington is managing his commanding duties well. The appointment of a quartermaster general seems to correct the supply problems within the army, and the France's decision...
to openly aid the colonies provides much needed relief following the tenuous winter.

Russell Freedman’s research into Valley Forge can create a curiosity in the reader about an important period of United States history. Two maps placed at the beginning of the book are very helpful in understanding where Valley Forge is, especially in relation to other battle sites. Pictures of multiple famous paintings, a period advertisement for soldiers, and portraits of the various generals and military personnel serving with Washington grace at least every other page. The pictures add information, are appropriately placed near the accompanying text, and have captions that tell whether the artist’s rendering is accurate or not. There is a good balance between the color and black and white art included. Freedman includes many details, from Washington’s appearance to quotes from various soldiers and Washington himself to the huts the soldiers lived in to a song sung in American taverns to battle information. Reading this book is much like visiting a living history museum. However, like visiting a living history museum, sometimes the sentences are long and intermediate aged students (grades 3-6) may struggle to completely understand the book. That being said, though the reader might not catch everything, this book does much to aid understanding of Washington’s desperate winter at Valley Forge.

Kristina Wolcott


HBB: 0618233784, 9780618233786, $35.00
612 336 p. : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
MS (HS Adult) Rating: 5

Heavy with information and detailed illustrations, David Macaulay’s *The Way We Work* is a worthwhile way to get to know the amazing human body. In the same style as his previous titles, ie: *The Way Things Work*), Macaulay carries readers through complex descriptions which are visually elaborated in his unique artistic style. Macaulay begins with atoms, progresses to cells, and then moves through each of the body’s systems, describing how each is assembled and how it works. Assisted by science writer Richard Walker, the information is accurate and the illustrations intricate enough to be highly informative. *The Way We Work* is quite well organized. However, readers with no previous experience with anatomy or chemistry will find the vocabulary and many explanations beyond comprehension. The glossary will illuminate some terms and body parts, though the overall writing is fairly sophisticated. Each section is so well illustrated, that even without grasping the text, users will still gain new understanding. Humor frequently surfaces in the artwork as well as section titles. The reproductive system (and a scientific description of the effects of intercourse) is discussed and illustrated. A fertilized egg is not referred to as a baby until birth, and breastfeeding is illustrated. Also note: there is a painstaking elaboration of the large intestine’s excretory functions. *The Way We Work* is a worthwhile adjunct to studies of the body, whether for science or for personal understanding. Readers will come away with a sense of the mystery and artistry exhibited in the human body.

Karen Schmidt
Science fairs abound and students are always looking for project ideas. While all of the books reviewed here are useful resources, the books/series are placed in the order a library could purchase them. The ones at the top of the list are there because they cover a wide variety of science fair topics; the other books are more topic-specific or more advanced.


HBB: 1402710739, 9781402710735, $19.949999999999999
PAP: 1402750676, 9781402750670, $7.9500000000000002
507/.8 224 p. : ill. ; 26 cm.
MS (HS) Rating: 5

Written in an easy-to-understand manner, students from upper elementary to high school will be able to use this book. With 100 projects, there is something for everyone. Teachers will also find experiments they can complete in class. In the introduction, Vecchione gives an overview to science fair projects and his book. He includes hints for completing and displaying the project. The book also includes a chapter of tips from a science fair judge which will be helpful to science fair participants. The projects are divided into the following categories: fun with critters, ask a friend, magnet madness, lots of botany, build it better, creative chemistry, skywatch, physics surprises, and amusing math. Each project description includes a guiding question, materials list, background, procedure, hypothesis, experiment to test hypothesis, and results and conclusions.


PAP: 471273368, 9780471273363, $14.949999999999999
507/.8 xii, 228 p. : ill. ; 26 cm.
HS (MS) Rating: 5


HBB: 471273384, 9780471273387, $29.949999999999999
PAP: 471273376, 9780471273370, $14.949999999999999
507/.8 xii, 228 p.: ill. ; 26 cm.
HS (MS) Rating: 5

These two titles are similar; the only real difference is the science fair projects included. Written at an upper middle school/lower high school level, both books contain the same seven-chapter “Complete Guide to Science Fair Projects.” The information in this section is designed to help the novice science fair participant plan his or her first project. It will also help veteran participants improve their projects. In the project section, readers are provided a recipe for each of the projects presented, including: the purpose, hypothesis, materials, experiment, procedure, and results. The projects cover a wide variety of topics. The books are well-written and the scientific information is accurate. They are
illustrated with sketches and photographs. *The Complete Handbook of Science Fair Projects* contains 50 such recipes, while *More Award-Winning Science* contains 35 projects. While designed to help students plan their own projects, teachers may also want to use some of the projects in the classroom.


PAP: 471586285, 9780471586289, $12.95
574/.078 vi, 217 p.: ill.; 24 cm.
HS (MS) Rating: 5


PAP: 471586307, 9780471586302, $12.95
540/.78 233 p.: ill.; 24 cm.
HS (MS) Rating: 5


PAP: 471177709, 9780471177708, $12.95
550/.78 vii, 234 p.: ill.; 24 cm.
HS (MS) Rating: 5

These three titles all start with a short introduction to science projects and the scientific method. VanCleave provides do-able recipes for 30 projects in each volume, including: purpose, materials, procedure, results and why. She goes beyond the recipes to provide suggestions for new approaches, designing experiments, and getting facts. There are sketches throughout the books illustrating the projects. *A+ projects in Biology* is divided into botany, zoology, and the human body. *A+ Projects in Chemistry* is full of a variety of projects related to chemistry. *A+ Projects in Earth Science* is divided into mapping the earth, earth and space, physical composition of the earth, earth's lithosphere, earth's hydrosphere, and the earth's atmosphere. Each book closes with appendices appropriate to the topic. These books, written for upper middle school and high school students, could also be useful to teachers in planning classroom activities. Van Cleave's series of science projects have been around for many years and have withstood the test of time.

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PAP: 691009864, 9780691009865, $26.94
507/.8 xvi, 253 p.: ill.; 26 cm.
HS (Adult) Rating: *5

This title is the most advanced one in this article; it is meant for upper level science students. There are 29 complicated projects presented in this book which could provide ideas for a science fair project. Each presentation includes a materials list, a description of the project, an explanation of the science and math, and information for more advanced users. The projects, illustrated with sketches, are ones high school scientists will enjoy and be challenged by.

Overall, each of these titles is worthy of inclusion your library, but if your funds are limited, my recommendation is start at the top and work your way down as you purchase them.
Until we reach home / Lynn Austin. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008028094

PAP: 0764204955, 9780764204951, $13.99
Fic 428 p. ; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

In *Until We Reach Home*, an historical fiction set in 1897, three young Swedish sisters face a series of tragedies that drives them to seek new life in America. Determined to protect her younger sisters from a predatory uncle, Elin, obtains passage for them through relatives in Chicago. During the journey, the women encounter rough weather, unsanitary living conditions, and extreme illness. Aboard ship, Elin contracts typhus and nearly dies. Upon reaching Ellis Island, Kirsten, the middle sister, also becomes ill. When she is discovered pregnant “out of wedlock,” she is nearly deported in shame.

Alone and scared, Sophie, the youngest sister, falls hopelessly in love with a man who is scheduled for deportation. Although they speak different languages, they encourage each other through shared Scriptures and music.

Finally arriving in America, the girls find they have been sold as mail-order brides to pay for their passages. They struggle to obtain employment and redeem their freedom.

Austin unfolds an interesting take on the history of Ellis Island immigrants, through the eyes of these sisters who speak no English, yet must prove that they will be able to live productive lives in a new and mysterious land. Interweaving the stories of each sister, she develops their individual personalities and personal journeys. At times, this becomes a bit frustrating for the reader, but, in the end, the strengths of each are intuitively blended into a fine tapestry of family, bonded together by friendship, sisterhood, and renewed life in Christ. Premarital sex, sexual abuse, and suicide are presented as part of the experiences that influence these characters’ life views. While the details of these experiences are merely sketched out for the reader, their impact adds to the redemptive outcome of this gentle romance.

*Kimberley D. Harris*

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Critical care / Candace Calvert. (Mercy Hospital ; 1) Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2009. LCCN 2008050285

PAP: 1414325436, 9781414325439, $12.99
Fic 293 p. ; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

As an emergency room nurse who was traumatized after being unexpectedly called upon to treat her fire-fighter brother, who later dies, Claire self-protectively creates a “master plan” for her life. Although her plan does involve moving to work at a new hospital, it certainly does not involve the ER. When she is called upon to provide stress counseling for the ER staff, and later pressed into service in the ER when they are short-handed, Claire begins to wonder what God is doing. Doesn’t He realize that ER is the worst place for her to be right now? This does not fit her master plan!

As Claire begins to move beyond the grief of her brother’s death, and struggles to regain her confidence in ER work, she also has to deal with Dr. Caldwell, who does not believe in the necessity or importance of the stress counseling Claire provides the staff.

*Critical Care*, by Candace Calvert, provides a thoughtful look at how different people function in high-stress, performance-oriented jobs in the medical field --whether they cope stoically, acknowledge their emotions, or ignore them and deal with the stress in self-destructive ways.

Claire finds healing in trusting that God’s master plan is the best for her life, even if it doesn’t make sense at the time. Dr. Caldwell finds himself ultimately broken before the Lord before understanding and healing...
occurs regarding his unwanted divorce.

Calvert’s main characters are well-developed, and readers are well introduced to uniquely individual secondary characters who will likely feature more fully in the following books in this Mercy Hospital series. While some of the story is based on events that occur in the hospital, much of the sensitively written story revolves around relationships, rather than ER drama. The novel also includes a book discussion guide.

Sherri Beeler


PAP: 0802455697, 9780802455697, $13.99
Fic 376 p. ; 21 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: *5

The Missionary: a Novel, by William Carmichael and David Lambert, is a well-crafted suspense-filled story illustrating the importance of adherence to God’s narrow path versus taking action on one’s own to accomplish a seemingly greater “good”. American Missionary David Eller works with a ministry that rescues street children in Caracas, Venezuela. He feels frustrated that no matter how many he helps, there remain thousands he cannot help. Eller views a political leader as the root of the problem and when an opportunity comes along to do something that may make political change possible, he takes action without considering the possible cost.

Should Christians take a stand against corruption? Should they get involved in the political realm? Is it ever permissible to deceive for the sake of “good”? How do we make the right choice when the boundaries between good and evil are blurred? These are some of the questions raised by this gripping story of betrayal and forgiveness. A group reading guide is provided with questions for discussion and further reflection.

The Missionary is a soul-stirring, heart-pounding journey thru a murky mix of mission work, espionage, and third-world politics. What makes this novel different from others in this genre is that it is filled with believable dilemmas of ethics, trust, reality, and commitment, while presenting a clear picture of the God who loves us unconditionally. Highly recommended.

Gail Whitney

Green: the beginning and the end / Ted Dekker.

(The circle: 0) Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009. LCCN 2009024590

HBB: 1595542884, 9781595542885, $25.99
Fic vii, 392 p. ; 23 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Green, by Ted Dekker, brings the Circle series to a dramatic, if ambiguous, ending—and takes readers back to the beginning of the story told in Black. Elyon’s people have been awaiting the return of Elyon for years now, and He appears to be silent. Many in the Circle are beginning to doubt His promises, or even His existence. Thomas Hunter’s son, Samuel, declares that it is time to fight back against the Horde enemy who is killing Elyon’s people. No longer should they turn the other cheek and simply love the Horde as Elyon commanded; they must go on the offensive, attacking and defeating the Horde once and for all.

The Circle of Elyon’s followers splinters as Samuel makes a pact to join Eram and the half-breed Horde in fighting against Qurong’s full-blooded Horde warriors. Literally all hell breaks loose as Samuel leads his mixed army—against the command of Elyon—into the bloody battle of Miggdon.

Although Green pulls together threads from the Lost Books series and other Dekker books, Green can be read and enjoyed...
without having read these additional books. And although Dekker’s introduction says that *Green* can be read either before reading *Black, Red,* and *White,* or after, readers would most likely find that it makes more sense to read the book after having read the first three books in the *Circle* series.

Like the other books in the series, *Green* is primarily plot-driven. Readers should be aware that Dekker’s book contains scenes of evil and sensuality, but they are important in illustrating the incredibly seductive power of sin, and Satan, who makes evil look desirable and appealing. *Green* is richly filled with biblical metaphors and allegory, and gives a relevant message to Christians living in today’s postmodern world.

*Sherri Beeler*

HBB: 1595544704, 9781595544704, $24.99  
PAP: 1595545832, 9781595545831, $15.99.  
Fic 332 p.; 24 cm.  
Adult, Mature HS Rating: 4*

After a horrendous car accident, Shauna McAllister awakes in the hospital, unable to recall the previous months of her life. She discovers the accident has caused brain damage to her brother, widened the chasm between her and her Presidential-candidate father and left her to face criminal charges. But pieces of what happened during the accident don’t add up and the people she thought she could trust conceal the truth. In her pursuit to uncover reality, she discovers she has a supernatural ability to “steal” others’ memories. What she finds in those memories leads her deeper into a web of lies, political corruption, and betrayal.

In *Kiss,* veteran Ted Dekker and newcomer Erin Healy create a suspenseful read full of surprises, touched with a whisper of romance. Multi-layered plotlines, populated by an almost unwieldy cast of characters, require focused reading in order to follow them, but the end result makes the effort worthwhile. The authors weave Christian themes in subtle ways without preaching—a rare skill—and develop graphic scenes without succumbing to explicit sensationalism or vulgarity.

Dekker fans will enjoy this book for his trademark complexity, while those who aren’t avid followers may appreciate the gentler, less corporate feel of the book. Healy’s influence seems to lend a deeper humanity and a greater emotional backstory to Dekker’s intricate plots.

*Jaclyn S. Miller*

HBB: 1595540083, 9781595540089, $24.99  
PAP: 1595545786, 9781595545787, $16.99  
Fic 386 p.; 24 cm.  
AdultRating: 4*

The tolerance doctrine rules Western culture in 2034, the setting for *Sinner.* Mild disagreement is viewed as a hate crime. A homogenized society insists that moderation of religious expression equals peace. For the most part religious observance is mere convention. The story undoubtedly forecasts the logical outcome of current events concerning the recently signed hate bill legislation.

Billy Rediger and Darcy Lang possess unique gifts that propel them to a position of unprecedented power. Tension derives from questions of reality and manipulation. Are the political powerbrokers manipulating them, or are Billy and Darcy the manipulators? Are supernatural forces driving the escalation of violence and social unrest, or is the precipitant chaos a window of opportunity to sabotage already compromised freedoms?
Marsuvees Black personifies evil as a classic standoff builds to its climax. Representing good are: Johnny with supernatural power (from the town of Paradise); his enigmatic fiancée, Kelly; and the rebellious teenager, Kat; plus 3,000 others who rally to proclaim their faith in Jesus.

Ted Dekker says each of his series is “circular,” meaning the individual novels may be read out of sequence. Sinner is the third book in the Paradise Trilogy, and is independent of Saint or Showdown. Dekker’s writing style grips the reader’s attention and sustains curiosity throughout the tale.

A strong Gospel message is woven into the narrative. However, the blinding-light, Damascus Road type of conversion experience is portrayed as typical, and the more traditional salvation through faith in Jesus isn’t emphasized. Individuals are powerless in the face of the three main characters’ overwhelming supernatural superiority.

The characters undergo rapid, dramatic transformations that seem a trifle jolting at times. Action and political maneuvering drive the story to its somewhat melodramatic conclusion. Overall, the book evokes an uneasy recognition of our present political slippery slope while entertaining us.

Deborah Rabern


PAP: 0825424437, 9780825424434, $13.99
Fic 288 p.; 22 cm.
AdultRating: 4

A mother escapes with one child, forced to leave an infant behind. The opening scene of The Black Cloister is fraught with a mother’s desperation and despair, when her only option is to flee with the one child she can save.

Seventeen years later Elise (the child) arrives in Berlin to work on her honors thesis. In reality she plans to track down the identity of her birth father and discover the truth about her mother.

Elise connects with Addison Wade, her mother’s friend and U.S. Ambassador to Germany. Mrs. Wade, concerned that unearthing the past will ruin her future, sends her son Carson to divert Elise. They become friends despite his initial stonewalling tactics. As he sympathizes with her pursuit of truth, Carson becomes her moral support as well as translator. Elise’s conflicted emotions collide with blurred memories of her own past, and a confrontation with an obscure cult, “The Chosen.”

Melanie Dobson makes good use of flashbacks and a parallel story line for the cult. Her characters reveal how intelligent, educated people become entangled in a perversion like “The Chosen.” She unveils the combined food-sleep deprivation, brainwashing techniques, and twisted scripture interpretation with harrowing reality. She shows the deepening of Elise’s faith as trials and disappointments beset her.

While the story alternates between the horror of the cult and Elise’s optimistic confidence, an intersection between the two becomes inevitable. Suspense builds as Elise runs headlong into peril and Ambassador Wade is forced to risk her reputation with an obtuse police force that isn’t impressed with her position or convinced that a crisis exists. An undercurrent of romance rounds out a satisfying conclusion in this first novel from Melanie Dobson.

A list of eight study questions is included at the back of the book to broaden understanding of cult culture.

Deborah Rabern


PAP: 0805447334, 9780805447330, $15.99
The Moon in the Mango Tree finds Barbara Perkins as a missionary doctor’s wife. Barbara meets her husband, Harvey Perkins, while she is still in high school and crusading as a suffragette. Passionate political views and a passion for singing leave Barbara little time to think about what life as a doctor’s wife will hold. Harvey’s medical experiences in WWI give him a passion to help those who do not have access to medical care. As a result, he and Barbara go to Thailand so that he can become a medical missionary. Throughout the book, Barbara finds following her husband’s dreams to the exclusion of her own becomes increasingly more difficult.

Pamela Binnings Ewen captures the tension of a distressed marriage and a disheartened woman in this fictionalized account of her grandmother. Told from Barbara’s point of view, this character-driven novel pushes inexorably toward the decisions Barbara must make about faith, marriage, and chasing her dreams. Barbara and Harvey do not seem like stereotypical Presbyterian missionaries from the 20’s in that they drink, dance, smoke, and face sexual temptations. At one point, out of sheer frustration, Harvey says, “My God.” (p. 341) Against the advice of the other missionaries, Barbara’s curious nature leads her into an old, Buddhist temple. While there, she visits a Buddhist monk, and he presents some tenets of Buddhism. The description of Thailand, where most of the book is set, sparkles with life. The fireflies, the elephants, the pet monkey, and the snakes in the attic create a realistic atmosphere. Because this book is in first person, Barbara’s thoughts balance with the dialogue and heighten tension even more. Barbara must learn that “Faith is grace. But the value of our lives is measured by what we do, by how we live.” (p.444)

Kristina Wolcott


PAP: 1434766411, 9781434766410, $14.99

In Talking to the Dead the sudden death of Kate’s young husband shatters her like a dropped mirror. Huge shards of memory are missing in action. She descends into a black hole of grief punctuated by the voice of her dead husband commenting on the most mundane aspects of her life – in the beginning. Then the voice turns vindictive.

Kate can barely force herself onto the second floor long enough for a shower, much less go back into their bedroom. As her personality disintegrates, Kate realizes she needs professional intervention. The trial and error process of finding help leads her to a traditional psychologist, a New Age spiritual therapist, medication, a television pastor, and an off-the-wall support group. As she reaches out to disadvantaged kids at a community center, her own journey of self-discovery begins. Aided by Pastor Jack who befriends her, Kate comes to terms with her past and wobbles toward healing.

Bonnie Grove’s debut novel tells a compelling story that is funny, poignant, and satisfying. She reveals the systematic erosion of Kate’s mental state through flashbacks before fractured emotions heave her into a psychotic break. The general ineptness of the professionals to address Kate’s spiritual void is both comical and pathetic. Mrs. Grove does a masterful job of unveiling Kate’s past wounds and their impact on her present reality. Kate inches toward wholeness, learning from each encounter with the professionals and the fellow wounded, as she begins to consider spiritual issues. Hope overcomes hopelessness as Kate reconfigures a future that has room for compassion and love.
The character of Pastor Jack who has his own issues and dilemmas is presented with a light touch. Quirky characters and Kate's wry perceptions are as authentic as they are entertaining. *Talking to the Dead* is almost impossible to put down.

*Deborah H. Rabern*


PAP: 0764205609, 9780764205606, $13.99

Fic 335 p. ; 21 cm.

Adult Rating: 3

Action, adventure, and villains abound in *Elisha's Bones.* Professor Jack Hawthorne is lured from his academic hideaway in North Carolina for an Indiana Jones-style quest that begins in South America and ends in Australia, by way of Ethiopia. Gordon Reese, a dying billionaire, offers Jack every archeologist's dream – carte blanche to unearth and trace clues, wherever they lead. He is intrigued by the challenge of locating the bones of Old Testament miracle-worker Elisha, although he's not sure of their existence. Skepticism gives way to conviction as the chain of information provides link after link of confirming evidence.

Jack forms an uneasy alliance with an old flame whose gifts with research and languages are essential for the success of the project. Their unresolved romance lends a subtle layer of tension to the pressure of interpreting and acting on cryptic data. In the beginning they do not realize that their financier has a secret agenda, and that rivals are vying to secure the prize ahead of them.

First-time novelist Don Hoesel makes his debut with a cinematic story that begs for wide-screen display. His imagination weaves a marvelous, complex drama from one verse (13) in 2 Kings (chapter 13). The hero, Jack Hawthorne, morphs from his hibernation in academia into a resourceful skilled investigator, secure in his ability to accomplish the mission. Although violence erupts throughout the story, it is handled with a fair degree of restraint. Jack's experience with the supernatural leaves the reader convinced that he will ultimately resolve his cynical view of Christianity.

A willingness to suspend logical disbelief is required for the beginning, middle and end of this fast-moving adventure. However, fans of Indiana Jones will revel in this archeological fairy tale. One can only hope that some astute producer will make this into a movie blockbuster.

*Deborah Rabern*

**The longing / Beverly Lewis.** (The courtship of Nellie Fisher ; 3) Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008027994

HBB: 0764205846, 9780764205842, $19.99


Fic 349 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Nellie Mae Fisher, her parents, and several other members of her Amish community have accepted the message of salvation and joined the New Order Church, causing her to lose her Old Order beau, Caleb Yoder. Caleb's father is a strict, stubborn man who has disinherited him for being involved with Nellie Mae. So Caleb has moved into his grandparents' home and no longer is in contact with her. He is later called back home to Honey Brook when his father is seriously injured by his mule. His cousin, Chris, whose family became Christians a long time ago and are now in a Mennonite church, also volunteers his help on the farm. While in Honey Brook, Chris meets Nellie Mae, not realizing that she and Caleb were once betrothed to each other. As they see each other more often, Chris and Nellie Mae begin to realize they have feelings for each other, but did Nellie Mae ever really get over Caleb?

*The Parting and The Forbidden*
were the first two books in the series by Beverly Lewis entitled The Courtship of Nellie Fisher. Book three, The Longing, is based on actual events that happened in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1966 when the Lancaster County New Order Church was birthed. In this Amish novel, Caleb's father's stubborn adherence to his Old Order ways causes much pain for his family and those who love them. The characters are simple folk that are both believable and endearing. The title for this book is quite appropriate as Caleb longs for Nellie Mae and she in turn longs for a deeper understanding of her Lord and Savior. Nellie Mae's love and excitement for her new Christian faith is clearly evident throughout this novel. While The Longing is a fictional accounting, the impact of Christianity on the Amish way of life has certainly been a major source of discussion, contention, and hope for many people, and this book is a great reflection of those very things.

Sherri Myers

The secret / Beverly Lewis. (Seasons of grace ; 1) Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. LCCN 2008051051
HBB: 076420680X, 9780764206801, $19.99
PAP: 0764205714, 9780764205712, $13.99
Fic 364 p.; 24 cm.

Amish fiction is one of the hottest subjects in the Christian field today and Beverly Lewis is at the top of that genre. Her latest series, Seasons of Grace, begins with The Secret. Outwardly the home of Grace Byler looks typical to her fellow Amish and her neighbors. Inside the four walls is another matter. Why does her mother wander late at night, crying and obviously in distress? Why does her father, reticent at the best of times, refuse to admit there is something wrong, even refuse to talk to her mother, Lettie about her troubles? Often when Grace is restless she hears her mother stirring and listens to her footsteps. She longs to share her mother's burden yet cringes to think what it might be and how it might affect her family. When Lettie leaves with only a note to Grace, the young woman attempts to keep her family together while waiting to hear word of Mamma's safety and whereabouts. Grace had so wanted to share the happy news of her engagement to Henry with her mother but now that may never come to be. And she is having second thoughts about this oh-so-thoughtful and reserved man, one much like her own father who is so inept at relationships.

Lewis' works are compelling to readers who find the lives of the Amish intriguing. Their simple faith is illustrated in her realistic stories of their everyday lives and the sorrows and troubles that often befall them, much like any group of people. Although a few of the issues in The Secret are resolved by the ending of the book, many are left unresolved as readers continue the series.

Ceil Carey

The missing / Beverly Lewis. (Seasons of grace ; 2) Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. LCCN 2009025139
HBB: 0764207245, 9780764207242, $19.99
PAP: 0764205722, 9780764205729, $13.99
Fic 332 p.; 24 cm.

Grace and Lettie Byler's stories continue in the second book of Seasons of Grace. Readers now know that Lettie is searching for her firstborn, given up for adoption when she was a young unmarried girl. Her family, even her husband, does not know this secret, except for her parents who initiated the adoption. Now years later, Lettie has left her home in search of information concerning this lost child yet her family's lack of knowledge about her history only fosters their imagination – why did she leave home?

Grace breaks off her engagement
with Henry, a quiet man, seemingly emotionless, and now is bombarded by the presence of Yonnie Bontrager on their family farm. Yonnie has offered to help her father with their livestock and seems to pop up every time she turns around. Grace has never met a more open young man and day by day, seems to enjoy his conversation more and more.

Intertwined is also the story of Heather, a young Englisher woman, whose father is having a home built in this Amish area. Heather has cancer but is interested in a wholistic approach to a cure, one her father vehemently opposes. Is Heather the long lost child that Lettie is searching for? Only the reading of the third book in this series will answer that question for the reader.

Lewis continues to uphold her fine reputation as a leader in writing Amish-based inspirational fiction in this heartwarming sequel to The Secret.

Ceil Carey

Words unspoken / Elizabeth Musser. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. LCCN 2009004740

PAP: 0764203738, 9780764203732, $13.99
Fic 398 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Is life random? Elizabeth Musser examines this question in Words Unspoken. In the eighties, a depressed high school graduate blames herself for the traffic accident that killed her mother. To recover her confidence behind the wheel, Lissa takes driving lessons. The instructor, Ev MacAllister, becomes a friend to Lissa. He helps her learn not only to drive but also to work through her grief. Meanwhile, an editor friend of Lissa's seeks the identity of a successful but reclusive author so Silvano can sell an interview for major money. Lissa thinks it's coincidence the author's new book is about a teen taking driving lessons. But the ensuing events cause Lissa to reconsider her assumptions.

Musser also shares threads about a grieving missionary, a divorcing socialite, a foolish broker, and the mystery author. You have to read far into the book before you begin to see how the subplots converge. Readers with limited patience may struggle to track with the pacing and frequent changes in viewpoint. But readers who appreciate complex stories appreciate Musser's style.

Characters occupy various stages of spiritual development. Ev devotes himself to serving Jesus and helping others. Lissa attended Sunday school as a child, but she doesn't believe. As the story progresses, however, her relationship with Ev challenges her to read the Bible, pray, and rethink her ideas.

Rachelle Dawson


PAP: 0446697990, 9780446697996, $13.99
Fic 294 p.; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 3

The Voice, by Bill Myers, is a page turner from start to finish with a plot that twists, turns, and keeps you reading even as you wonder "Is this possible?".

The need to protect his thirteen-year-old niece Jazmin thrusts burned-out former Special Forces agent Charlie Madison back into a world he left behind. Someone kidnapped Jasmine's parents after they created a computer program that allows them to hear the Voice of God. Charlie and Jazmin must find her parents and the program before it falls into the wrong hands and turns into a weapon or is used to unravel the world's religions. Aided in their quest by Lisa, who is a seemingly innocent bystander, and by an order of priests, they come up against Muslim terrorists, Israeli Mossad agents, and a host of US agencies.
Amidst excessive violence, there are interesting dialogues/monologues, some of which seem unrealistic. There are glimpses of character insight, but none are fleshed out enough to achieve significant depth. Some characters are stereotypical, others seem unbelievable. Even the main protagonists Charlie, Jazmin, and Lisa seem somewhat elusive. The novel does illustrate some basic truths of God in characters and situations. However there is also an ambiguity that leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions about the centrality of Christ.

Gail Whitney

A lady of secret devotion / Tracie Peterson. (Ladies of liberty) Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008014237

HBB: 0764205323, 9780764205323, $19.99
PAP: 0764201476, 9780764201479, $13.99

Fic 367 p. ; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 3

A Lady of Secret Devotion by Tracie Peterson is set in 19th century Philadelphia. A young lady of modest means, Cassie Stover is hired to be a companion to Mrs. Jameston, a wealthy elderly woman. Mark Langford comes to Philadelphia to investigate the death of his best friend whom he suspects Mrs. Jameston’s son may have killed. In order to help his investigation, Mark suggests that he and Cassie pretend they are courting. What begins as a game of make-believe slowly becomes more than that.

This is a historical romance spiked with intrigue, suspense, and danger. Cassie and the other women in the novel are women of faith. Mark struggles with his until coming to a living faith.

Apart from being a well-written Christian page-turner, the characters are likeable, the story is interesting, and it proclaims God’s love for us all, without coming off as preachy.

Other books in this series include: A Lady of Hidden Intent and A Lady of High Regard Each book stands on its own but shares a common focus on strong-willed women in the pre-Civil War era.

This book will appeal to fans of Tracie Peterson and those who enjoy lighthearted historical romances spiced with a little intrigue.

Gail Whitney

A promise to believe in / Tracie Peterson. (Brides of Gallatin County ; 1) Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008027992

HBB: 0764205862, 9780764205866, $19.99
PAP: 0764201484, 9780764201486, $13.99

Fic 364 p. ; 24 cm.

Brides of Gallatin County is the story of three sisters in 19th century Montana. After years of wandering from place to place as they were growing up, their father finally settles down to run a roadhouse along the stage line. In A Promise to Believe In, the father is killed when a fight breaks out in front of the local saloon/brothel and a stray bullet fatally wounds him. The owner of the brothel tries to buy the girls out, but they won’t sell; they don’t want to see the brothel expanded. The girls are part of a small Christian community in the area and this community supports them in many ways as they successfully make it on their own. A stranger arrives in town, claiming to be the brother of the oldest sister’s dead husband. Gwen learns things about her husband she never before knew.

In A Love to Last Forever, the story continues with little lapse in time between the first and
second book. The sisters befriend one of the girls in the brothel, leading to the eventual escape from the life she hates. The second sister falls in love with one of the few local single men. Just when she is ready to commit to marriage, a son she didn’t know he had shows up. Beth learns to love the boy.

Throughout the series the sisters rely on the Lord for strength and courage as tragedies befall them. The books are well-researched and well-written. Peterson’s story line draws readers in. The reader will finish the second book wanting to know what comes next, asking when the next one will be out. Brides of Gallatin County will expand the reader’s knowledge of our country’s history as they read these novels of God’s faithfulness in hard times. This series has something for those who enjoy historical fiction and those who enjoy romance.

Jane Mouttet

Where the heart leads / by Kim Vogel Sawyer. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008028000

PAP: 0764202634, 9780764202636, $13.99
Fic 347 p.; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

In Where the Heart Leads, the lives of simple Kansas Mennonites and big city Bostonians are brought together due to a young man trying to find his place in the world. Thomas Ollenburger is a recent college graduate who returns to his home to figure out what do with his life. He is unsure if he wants to stay and help out his family on the farm or go back to Boston and pursue the career he’s always dreamed about. To make matters more complicated, both settings feature young women who are vying for a place in Thomas’s heart.

This book takes a subject not normally used in historical fiction. It is a unique and interesting read as it shows a different side of the Mennonites, who have often been portrayed as a modern version of the Amish. Here, the reader is taken back to the turn of the century and is shown how these people lived and survived in the Midwest. The characters in this novel are all very simple and down to earth. It is a rare occasion when the reader ends up feeling sympathy for both of the women who want Thomas to stay in their lives.

Politics and other hot topic issues of the time period are brought to life as Thomas delves into the newspaper business. The historical tidbits sprinkled throughout bring the story to life. The reader can feel the excitement of the upcoming election as the young people in the book are anxious to have their feelings and thoughts heard.

While this book is a sequel to Waiting for Summer’s Return, I feel it can be read as a standalone novel. Enough information is given so that a new reader will not feel lost while reading. If however, you have read the previous novel, it is a treat to be reunited with the characters and see how everyone has fared in the past years.

Deborah Khuanghlawn


PAP: 0802456790, 9780802456793, $13.99
Fic 374 p.; 21 cm.
Adult Rating: 3

In Latter-Day Cipher, Latayne C. Scott weaves a thought-provoking tale of mystery. Someone in Salt Lake City is murdering former Mormons and people who have gone against the Mormon faith, leaving their bodies in grotesque tableaus, covered with markings in a nineteenth-century Mormon code. Journalist Selonnah Zee is headed to Utah to vacation with her cousin Roger, a spokesman for the Mormon Church, and is assigned to cover the story. As the police search for answers, Roger is obsessed with making
sure the public does not hold the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to blame for the murders, spinning the words of the Book of Mormon to make the church look good in the eyes of the media. This causes Roger’s wife, Eliza, to question her lifelong Mormon beliefs and her marriage even as she and her young daughter prepare for a pilgrimage to several Mormon sacred sites.

This book raises several interesting questions and manages to promote the Christian message without being preachy. Key points of Mormon theology and the origin of the Mormon code carved on the victims’ bodies are explained in context so that the reader need have no prior knowledge of Mormonism to understand the plot. Although several crime scenes are described, all violence occurs offstage and the crime scenes are not depicted graphically. The characters are believable in their struggles with questions of faith, and a subplot in which Selonnah struggles with her mother’s diagnosis with Alzheimer’s disease adds an extra dimension to the main character. Although it starts a bit slowly, the plot picks up and moves along at a good pace. Readers will be kept guessing until the very end, and the conflict is resolved in a satisfying and rather unpredictable manner, making Latter-Day Cipher an excellent choice for mystery lovers.

*Elizabeth Norton*


PAP: 1595545026, 9781595545022, $14.99

Fic xii, 307 p.; 22 cm.

AdultRating: 3

Reading One Hundred Years of Happiness by Nicole Seitz is a bit like peeling an artichoke, unwrapping layer upon layer until you reach the centerpiece in the last ten pages of the story. It will require readers to exercise what Coleridge calls “willing suspension of disbelief,” as one of the characters appears to be a ghost of sorts—but appearances are misleading.

The novel is a strong tribute to those who fought in the Vietnam war, who committed and witnessed terrible atrocities, and then returned home—unthanked—to jeers and prejudice. John Porter, a Vietnam veteran, has always been a volatile, difficult man to live with—partly because of the impact of his difficult childhood, and partly from war experiences that he’s never talked about. With the love, encouragement, and outright meddling of his daughter Katie, bits and pieces of John’s past become exposed, and he turns to excessive drinking to cope with the pain. Yet healing begins as John faces the past, and his daughter and wife come to appreciate John as a hero, a man, and a father as they begin to understand some of his Vietnam experiences.

The story is told from the point of view of five main characters. Two are written in first person and the others are not, which creates a choppy feeling throughout the narrative, and a sense of surreality or detachment from the characters. Readers should be aware that the novel contains some “earthy” talk about women’s issues, and John’s sometimes inappropriate behavior. The novel also briefly employs common terms of vulgarity, and slang bordering on profanity. Three of the main characters appear to have a relationship with Christ, although that is not a focus in this story full of patriotism, humility, respect, and thankfulness for our military veterans.

*Sherri Beeler*

**Certain jeopardy / Jeff Struecker with Alton Gansky. Nashville: B & H Pub., 2009. LCCN**

PAP: 0805448535, 9780805448535, $14.99

Fic xviii, 381 p.; 22 cm.
Written by decorated soldier and Army chaplain Jeff Struocker and minister Alton Gansky, Certain Jeopardy offers a thrilling look inside the lives of America’s most elite soldiers. The story opens in the mountains of Afghanistan, where a team of six diverse Special Operations soldiers led by Sergeant Major Eric Moyer are on an intelligence-gathering mission for the Army. Safely returned, Moyer and his team enjoy time with their families before being given another assignment, this time investigating a possible Al Qaeda training center in Venezuela. Their mission reaches certain jeopardy status, meaning that it involves a direct threat to US national security, when they discover that potential terrorists are holding the family of a nuclear-energy expert hostage in order to force him to relocate to Iran. To carry out their mission, the team may have to end the life of one innocent man in order to protect millions of others.

The subject matter of this book is especially timely and the plot maintains a breakneck pace from start to finish. All characters are well-developed and realistic. Subplots involving the family members that each of the team members leave behind help to develop minor characters and explore the special challenges faced by family members of military personnel. The message of faith and of God’s protection is evident throughout the book in the faith of several of the minor characters as well as one of the main characters. Although various military engagements are described, the violence is never graphic. A glossary of common military abbreviations used in the story is helpful. This book will be well-received by adult fans of action and adventure stories and is especially recommended for family members of military personnel and fans of television dramas such as The Unit and Army Wives.

Elizabeth Norton

HBB: 1934812285, 9781934812280, $24.95
PAP: 1934812293, 9781934812297, $16.95
Fic 301 p.; 24 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

My Name is Falon: a novel by Kim Wiese, is an historical fiction story, set during the Battle of the Alamo. The Macvail family is torn from their home in a small village in Scotland by greedy land agents. The villagers watch helplessly as their homes and livelihoods are burned to the ground.

Father sells all of their worldly possessions and books passage for the Macvails on a ship sailing to Texas. Aboard ship, Mother contracts typhus and dies. Overshadowed by previous blame for her sister’s accidental death, fourteen-year-old Falon blames herself for her mother’s death, as well. She comforts herself and those around her by playing her flute.

Upon reaching Texas, Falon’s father enters into a marriage of convenience with a recently widowed family friend. The Macvails begin to carve out a life for themselves in this wild territory where Indians, poisonous snakes, inclement weather conditions, and marauding Mexicans challenge daily survival. Falon, dissatisfied with the new family dynamics, marries a handsome slave trader. His early kindnesses quickly turn to abandonment and infidelity, as Falon tries, without success, to produce an heir. The struggle between the Texans and the Mexican government increases until war ignites. Through prayer and sheer survival instinct, Falon finds strength to lead the town’s women and children to safety and makes some unusual friendships along the way.

Wiese presents a fresh take on the history of the Alamo, through the eyes of a young Scotswoman who proves her mettle on the Texas frontier. Through personal journal entries, Falon
becomes a living, breathing legacy in the reader's heart. After the somewhat meandering journey Falon has taken from Scotland through the wilds of Texas, readers may find the swift closure ending a bit disjointed, but, all-in-all, Falon's story is beautifully rendered.

Kimberley D. Harris


PAP: 1414314752, 9781414314754, $13.99
Fic 432 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Veiled Freedom opens in Afghanistan, 2001. Steve Wilson, a young special ops soldier, learns that the freedom for which he believed he was fighting provides the corrupt with paths to fulfill their greedy desires. Eight years later, Steve returns to Afghanistan as a private security contractor. When he arrives, he meets the idealistic Amy, who works for a non-governmental organization to provide aid to needy Afghans. Though Amy’s primary goal is to share the truth of Jesus’ love with others, Afghani laws restrict what she can say and where she can go without an escort. Amy’s inability to speak Dari also hampers her ability to share Jesus with others. Jamil, looking for work just when Amy needs someone, seems to be the perfect fit for the job. Steve, Amy, and Jamil all wish for freedom in Afghanistan and for injustices to be corrected, but they find the tide of culture nearly impossible to change.

Jeanette Windle’s writing crackles with the tension of contemporary headlines. The story delves into Afghani culture and the oppression that sharia law delivers. However, more than a treatise on the injustices of the culture, the plot moves quickly. The three principle characters tend toward the heroic, but have just enough weaknesses to keep them real. The setting, modern-day Afghanistan, feels like a scene from the nightly news. The dialogue helps push the story forward, and does a wonderful job at increasing the tension. An element of suspense winds throughout the story, increasing an already tense situation. Windle makes use of many acronyms, like MOI, NGO, PSD, CS, etc. Before the acronym is used, Windle uses the full term, but following the first use of the term, she follows with the acronym. Without careful attention, it can be easy to lose track of what the various acronyms stand for. The theme, true freedom comes from the Truth, rings out clearly through the story. Read this in anticipation of the coming sequel.

Kristi Wolcott

How sweet it is / Alice J. Wisler. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. LCCN 2009004739

PAP: 0764204785, 9780764204784, $13.99
Fic 309 p.; 22 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

Alice Wisler provides another likable heroine in her second novel, How Sweet It Is. Deena Livingston had been planning her wedding until her car accident. The accident left her with serious scars, both emotional and physical. In order to start over she leaves her comfortable job as a pastry chef at an upscale restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, and moves into her grandfather’s North Carolina mountain cabin. The cabin and all its belongings will become hers, after she fulfills the will’s stipulation that she teach cooking at an after-school center. Upon arrival Deena is embraced by her flamboyant Aunt Regena Lorraine, who helps Deena move into her beloved father’s cabin. As Deena adjusts to her new life she realizes she is not the only one who carries scars. With the help of an Eagles-lyric spouting plumber, surly middle-schoolers, and the charming social worker, Deena decides life can once again become sweet.

Wisler’s first novel Rain Song
showcased her ability for providing readers with an absorbing plot laced with a cast of memorable characters. Her second offering builds upon this talent, making the reader eager for her next novel. Her plot devices and character interactions breathe life into the Christian fiction genre. The only real holdback is the cover, which is embarrassingly saccharin in design. The content is definitely solid, and Wisler is a welcome addition in those writers who offer spiritual truths wrapped up in believable, contemporary settings.

_Pam Webb_

HBB: 0718020812, 9780718020811, $39.99

Adult Rating: 2

The NKJV Study Bible joins an already (over-?) populated field of study Bibles, one expanded recently by two very popular offerings: the NLT Study Bible and the ESV Study Bible.

As for the Bible translation it employs, the NKJV is a well-respected conservative evangelical Bible translation. The NKJV uses the Majority Text of the New Testament instead of the critical text accepted by almost all contemporary scholars and used by all other reputable modern translations, evangelical and otherwise.

The Bible is laid out pleasantly and cleanly in double-column, paragraphed type with study notes at the bottom of each page and various information boxes scattered throughout the text. Editorial comments generally take up about a third of each page, and every book has about a two-page introduction handling standard issues like author, date, and emphases.

The overall position of the study notes lies in the mainstream of American 21st century evangelicalism. To choose just three examples, positive and negative:

- It accepts Paul’s authorship of the Pastoral Epistles.
- It takes the standard position to the meaning of the Greek word ἀγάπη (agape), though many linguistics scholars have demonstrated that view to be without merit.
- It takes an evenhanded view of Calvinism and Arminianism, justly summarizing both sides in a box on "election" under Romans 9.

It is non-committal on the interpretation of Genesis 1, acknowledging that Christians disagree over whether the “seven days” are a “literary frame on which the story of creation is draped” or “a strict pattern of seven 24-hour days”—but apparently not adjudicating the dispute. The notes do, however, point toward the idea that the seven days are a literary frame. “Created” in Genesis 1:1 is defined as “to fashion anew,” and the notes on Genesis 1:2 state clearly that the earth “had been reduced” to a state of chaos at some point before the creation week.

Mark L. Ward

Unleashing courageous faith: the hidden power of a man’s soul / Paul Coughlin. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. LCCN 2008045786

HBB: 0764205773, 9780764205774, $19.99
PAP: 076420761X, 9780764207617, $13.99
248.8/42

285 p. ; 24 cm.

Adult Rating: 4

God made men and women different. On purpose! Paul Coughlin pulls no punches in his latest book, Unleashing Courageous Faith, which explores the concept of thumos, a Greek word loosely translated as passion, indignation, spiritedness—that which impels men to deeds of eternal consequence.

“[A man’s] thumos causes him to muster the inner heat...to undergo the criticism, suffering, and labor required to become a real leader, to fulfill his duty, and to reach the highest level of true masculinity: love bolstered by courage.”

Although Coughlin’s high-spirited style draws the reader in, this book is no comfort food. Its tone is challenging and thought provoking, even bordering at times on severe. For example, the chapter entitled “Spiritual Abuse: Thumos-Spilling” indict[s] many American churches as spiritually abusive institutions led by false shepherds. Following “the Official Script”—including legalism and “happiness...
mentality”—they snuff out any trace of God-given thumos in their flock.

Men who display courageous faith are an endangered species in today’s entertainment-centric, materialistic culture, according to Coughlin. But, he concludes with a rallying cry to fight anyway, rewrite the “Official Script”, and join the Cast of the Courageous.

Some readers may feel uncomfortable with a few scraps of slang that border on profanity. (Coughlin makes a point about using “common male standards” and speaking “the language of the people.”) He also mentions how he admonished a sound technician at a men’s conference for playing Amy Grant tracks between sessions—and asked him to play U2 instead. And then, there’s the call to protest Christmas “affluenza” by modeling healthy spirituality at Christmastime.

While some will disagree with the book on certain points, Unleashing Courageous Faith makes a powerful case for Christian men to emerge from a cotton-candy faith and fulfill God’s purposes.

A 12-lesson study guide is included in the book.

Steve Badaracco


PAP: 0802422586, 9780802422583, $14.99
241.68 223 p.; 23 cm.
AdultRating: 5

In the midst of these difficult, sometimes desperate, economic times, Howard Dayton uses Money and Marriage God’s Way to provide readers with timely and timeless information to improve their relationships and financial circumstances. Dayton, cofounder of Crown Financial Ministries, uses a combination of biblical principles and common sense to lay out a plan to financial freedom for all engaged and/or married couples.

Dayton addresses several common financial situations (early marriage, step families, empty nest etc.) while sharing examples of real couples, scripture and encouragement in each chapter. For readers that have never approached finances in an organized way, Dayton’s approach may seem uncommon. It is, however, backed by scripture and plenty of real people who attest to its success.

Dayton’s premise that an honorable marriage leads to responsible financial management is carried throughout the book. The most significant thing about the book might well be its practicality. Dayton shares in the introduction, “I urge you to read this book but, more than that, to consume this book.” To that end, there is plenty of workspace in the margins for taking notes and recording the “once and for all” decisions couples are encouraged to make. A companion web site with articles, sample forms and other resources makes the information easily customizable for anyone.

Managing marriage and maintaining responsible financial resources is not easy to do. This book, however, shows a practical, step by step process anyone can follow that encourages readers to improve both!

Rachel Langston


HBB: 0830835148, 9780830835140, $26.00
PAP Lg PRINT: 0446541281, 9780830835270, $25.00
242 364 p.; 24 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Longing for God challenges Christians to not just know God but to experience God anew. Using Christian mystics, Desert Fathers and Mothers, philosophers, and other Christian saints, the reader will desire a deeper intimacy with God.

According to the authors, this book is written with two purposes in mind. The first is to detail seven primary paths to
God that have developed throughout Christian history. These are: The right ordering of our love for God; the spiritual life as journey; the recovery of knowledge of God lost in the fall; intimacy with Jesus Christ; the right ordering of our experiences of God; action and contemplation and divine ascent. To help explore each of these paths, the authors have selected several great Christian saints to help the modern day reader develop a similar confidence in experiencing life with God. By providing brief backgrounds of each saint and exploring selected works of each saint, the reader gains a clearer understanding of intimacy with God.

The second primary purpose is much more personal as it is the desire of the authors for the reader to awaken and grow in his or her knowledge, understanding and commitment to God. This is not a book that is simply to be read; rather, this is a book that encourages the reader to reflect upon each path and seek and find “the life which is life indeed.”

By providing quick biographical sketches and easy to understand discussion of selected works by each saint, the reader will find this to be an enjoyable book dedicated to helping Christians on the journey to finding fullness of life in God.

Chris Carroll


PAP: 0801071887, 9780801071881, $13.99
220.1/32 266 p.; 22 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, both being prolific writers, lecturers, and scholars on the history and interpretation of Scripture, bring us their latest title, Making Sense of Bible Difficulties.

The authors’ firm position is evident in the opening line of their introduction: “The truth is that there is not even one demonstrated error in the original text of the Bible.”

Geisler and Howe lament the presumption-of-guilt bias that modern critics often betray as they subject the Word of God to scathing interrogation. As in the old tale of the blind men describing the elephant, these critics will latch onto particularly obscure snippets of Scripture and wave them about as “proof” that the whole Bible is a potpourri of religious myth and legend.

The book is arranged in biblical order from Genesis to Revelation, covering the 66 books that most Christian denominations agree belong in the canon of Scripture. (Geisler and Howe do not consider the Apocrypha to be inspired.) Each “problem” is concisely stated in a paragraph or two, followed by its “solution”—a few paragraphs of facts and arguments.

These authors—both Christian conservatives—exhibit a refreshing degree of objectivity, even when dealing with hotly debated topics such as creationist Old Earth vs. Young Earth theories. They present the merits of differing viewpoints and emphasize that the Bible stands up to any scrutiny that is both honest and scientific.

Who can benefit from this book? Although adults are the target audience, it is also a comfortable read for older teens. Furthermore, it is sure to be a welcome resource for K-12 Bible teachers, youth leaders, camp counselors—anyone who deals with eager young minds adept at bringing—to quote Fiddler on the Roof’s Reb Tevye—“problems that would cross a rabbi’s eyes.”

Steve Badaracco


PAP: 1557255121, 9781557255129, $16.95
248.3/2 103 p.: ill. (chiefly col.); 22 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

By providing quick biographical sketches and easy to understand discussion of selected works by each saint, the reader will find this to be an enjoyable book dedicated to helping Christians on the journey to finding fullness of life in God.
MacBeth provides readers with a number of suggestions to keep the mind focused as readers spend time with each person, so the activity maintains a prayerful focus and doesn’t become all about drawing. She encourages readers to hang the prayer icon someplace visible so they will see it throughout the day, and be reminded to pray. MacBeth provides numerous visual examples of prayer icons throughout the book, and the last few chapters give readers suggestions for using this method in other forms of worship: for thanksgiving, for mapping one’s spiritual journey and history, for healing of old wounds and hurts, for focusing on the names of God, for scripture memorization and meditation, and so on. She even includes a chapter on how to “pray in color” using the computer, if you are inclined that way. The book is conversationally written with personal anecdotes, and is an easy-to-follow “how to” book.

If you are visually or kinesthetically oriented, if you find your prayer time becoming boring, if you have a hard time focusing or sitting still for long periods of time, or if you simply want to try a new way to worship, Sybil MacBeth’s book Praying in Color will give you a wealth of ideas. All you need is at least fifteen minutes, paper, and a handful of markers or colored pencils. Says MacBeth, in her kids’ edition, “praying in color is a way to pray with your eyes, your ears, and your hands. It invites your mind, your heart, and your body into the prayer.”


PAP: 1557255954, 9781557255952, $16.99
248.3/2 38 p. : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
INT (MS) Rating: 4


SPR: 1557256187, 9781557256188, $15.95
248.3/2 1 v. (unpaged) : ill. ; 25 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 1

If you are visually or kinesthetically oriented, if you find your prayer time becoming boring, if you have a hard time focusing or sitting still for long periods of time, or if you simply want to try a new way to worship, Sybil MacBeth’s book Praying in Color will give you a wealth of ideas. All you need is at least fifteen minutes, paper, and a handful of markers or colored pencils. Says MacBeth, in her kids’ edition, “praying in color is a way to pray with your eyes, your ears, and your hands. It invites your mind, your heart, and your body into the prayer.”

MacBeth’s technique is easy. Simply doodle a small shape on the page and write the name of a person for whom you want to pray in the center of the shape. Continue to doodle details to the shape—dots, lines, zig-zags—and use markers to color in the shapes. Then proceed to the next shape and person you wish to pray for, until your paper is full of names and images.

MacBeth provides readers with a number of suggestions to keep the mind focused as readers spend time with each person, so the activity maintains a prayerful focus and doesn’t become all about drawing. She encourages readers to hang the prayer icon someplace visible so they will see it throughout the day, and be reminded to pray.

MacBeth provides numerous visual examples of prayer icons throughout the book, and the last few chapters give readers suggestions for using this method in other forms of worship: for thanksgiving, for mapping one’s spiritual journey and history, for healing of old wounds and hurts, for focusing on the names of God, for scripture memorization and meditation, and so on. She even includes a chapter on how to “pray in color” using the computer, if you are inclined that way. The book is conversationally written with personal anecdotes, and is an easy-to-follow “how to” book.

MacBeth has a simplified kids edition of Praying in Color which would be suitable for mid- to upper elementary students; some of the exercises she includes are not found in the adult book, but would certainly be suitable for adults to use. While it is not a necessary purchase, people of all ages could use the Praying in Color Journal, which is a large, blank spiral notebook to draw in. Some pages include brief suggestions for prayer journaling; other pages are simply labeled by type of prayer.

Sherri Beeler

Muslims, Christians, and Jesus: gaining understandings and building relationships / Carl Medearis. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008028254

PAP: 0764205676, 9780764205675, $13.99
261.2/7 192 p. ; 21 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

With over 1.5 billion followers totaling over 20% of the world’s population, Islam is one of the world’s most influential religions. In the United States, Islam is a household word, but few can discuss this religion without misunderstanding, repeating common errors, projecting fear, or expressing anger. In Muslims, Christians, and Jesus, Carl Medearis attempts to mediate this gap and give Christians a basic understanding of this worldwide movement. Medearis’s basic thesis is that the most effective way of sharing God’s grace with Muslims is through common understanding, mutual respect, and the love of Jesus Christ. The pages of this work are filled with
ADULT NONFICTION

HBB: 044658035X, 9780446580359, $21.99
PAP Lg Print: 0446541281, 9780446541282, $23.99
248.4 272 p. ; 24 cm.
Adult Rating: 5

In Never Give Up, author and speaker Joyce Meyer delves into many different aspects of perseverance in the Christian life. Using Scripture verses, personal stories, and historical accounts of well-known individuals, she makes her point from many different angles.

She deals with not giving up specifically in the areas of health, family, and finances. Meyer also addresses related issues such as goal setting, overcoming fear, accepting sacrifice, and taking on the attitude of a conqueror. She encourages her readers to walk through adversity with a godly attitude and biblical behavior, regardless of their feelings. She shares her own difficult past with vulnerability to illustrate how to cope with feelings of guilt and shame.

Some of the inspiring stories of historical figures include that of Madame Curie, Winston Churchill, Levi Strauss, and many others. She has a list in the back of the book of which historical figures she covers in which chapters, but she unfortunately doesn't document where she found her information about each one. Consequently, there is no way of knowing if her information is historically accurate. She quotes Scripture from the Amplified Bible, which some readers may find distracting because the verses are frequently interrupted by parenthesis and brackets.

Nicole S. 

PAP: 160791008X, 9781607910084, $24.99
394/.2663 xi, 471 p. ; 24 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

Christmas: Celebrating the Christian History of American Symbols, Songs and Stories by Angie Mosteller addresses nearly every symbol commonly associated with Christmas. For instance, the Christmas tree,
often credited to pagan practices, may have its roots in Christian traditions. Mosteller points out three possible ways the Christmas tree made its way into homes. The section on the tradition of bells at Christmas provides a fascinating look into the use of bells in ancient times, especially by Jewish priests in the Holy Place, and how Christ’s work on the cross made it possible for Christians to “freely approach the throne of God” – no bells required. She covers the history of several classic Christmas hymns from “Angels from the Realms of Glory” to “While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night.” Classic tales and excerpts from books of many eras round out this book.

Angie Mosteller researched each section of Christmas thoroughly, including extensive footnotes, multiple possibilities when definitive conclusions are lacking; she even includes ways to address potentially controversial traditions such as Santa Claus with children. In the section on the star of Bethlehem, Mosteller discusses the ways the scholars in the East would have studied stars and interpreted the symbolism of various configurations. Since mythology dominated the understanding of the stars in eastern thinking, this section references the beliefs surrounding Jupiter, Saturn, and Pisces. In the unit about carols, Mosteller included music and lyrics. The unit with classic Christmas stories gives read aloud times at the beginning of each story. In a time when people fail to consistently link Christianity with Christmas, this book provides a Christ-centered perspective.

Kristina Wolcott

Filling up the afflictions of Christ: the cost of bringing the gospel to the nations in the lives of William Tyndale, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton / John Piper. (The swans are not silent ; 5) Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009. LCCN 2009001557

HBB: 1433510464, 9781433510465, $17.99
B or 2660092/2 126 p.; 24 cm.
AdultRating: 4

The most recent installment of John Piper’s The Swans are Not Silent series (the first four volumes were reviewed in a previous issue of CLJ) is Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ: The Cost of Bringing the Gospel to the Nations in the Lives of William Tyndale, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton.

Tyndale was a pioneering Bible translator who lost his life because of his desire to let the English plough boy read the Bible in his native tongue. He bequeathed to us many phrases that show up in newspaper headlines to this very day, words as enduring as "Let there be light."

Adoniram Judson was another life poured out in love for God and others. Sadly, it was not only Judson’s life that was spent. His first two wives and seven of his thirteen children all died—in a manner of speaking—early because of his mission work in Burma.

John G. Paton was yet another life marked by loss. Like Judson, he experienced deep misery over the loss of his wife and infant child. But he stayed, spending decades on the island of Aniwa, where God had planned for him to reap a great spiritual harvest.

Piper ends his book with a brief mention of important missiological themes: the cry of unreached people groups and the possible necessity of Christian martyrdom as a way to reach them.

Piper writes in an engaging style (each chapter was originally presented as a special sermon at his annual pastor’s conference), showing familiarity with the important biographical sources on each life and offering multiple helpful footnotes. Piper’s work does not add to our knowledge of his three subjects; that is not his aim. He aims to stir readers’ affections toward the God who ruled the lives of these men (and their wives—Judson’s especially shine). His work would be a helpful source for illustrative material or for a brief but absorbing introduction to three luminaries of the Christian past.
Christmases past from authors such as Mark Twain and Norman Vincent Peale. This section also includes recipes for dishes such as “English Mince Meat”, “Apple Pie” and “Frozen Pudding”.

The stories and poems are classics by well-known authors. Some contain fairies, goblins and folk-lore. Many have a positive teaching message.

The Rockwell paintings, both the full page and smaller ones, complement the stories they are printed alongside. They are vivid and clear.

The age appropriateness of the stories varies widely. Some would be excellent read-alouds for young children as part of a family Christmas tradition and others contain content that might be more appropriate for older kids. There is value in having such a diverse collection of Christmas-related stories by classic authors, as well as the Rockwell paintings, keeping in mind the cautions stated.

Amy Simon


HBB: 0810982625, 9780810982628, $24.95

394.2/68282/0973 223 p.: ill. (some col.); 29 cm.

Adult (All ages)  Rating: 5

Norman Rockwell’s Christmas Book is a beautiful collection of stories, carols and poems, interspersed with both full page Norman Rockwell paintings and smaller pictures by the famous artist. Eight of the paintings, size 7.5”x 9”, can be easily removed and framed.

The book is divided into five parts. “The First Christmas” contains Scripture, carols and poems that refer to the birth of Christ. Part two contains classic Christmas stories, including ‘Mr. Edwards meets Santa Claus’ by Laura Ingalls Wilder and ‘The Gift of the Magi’ by O. Henry. Part three is called ‘Carols’, which contains piano music with vocal lines, lyrics and chords which could be used for guitar for each carol. It includes fifteen traditional carols, such as “Joy to the World” and “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”. “Poems” is Part Four, which includes classics from Robert Frost, Lewis Carroll and others. Part Five is called “Christmas Remembered”. It contains the remembrances of

Parents and those who work with elementary age though mid-teenage children can find some ideas in Scott Strother’s compendium, The Adventurous Book of Outdoor Games. More than 130 classic games and many variations are listed with clear instructions for how to play. Basic games such as Horse, Mother May I, Dodgeball, and Steal the Bacon are included along with non-games like paper airplane competitions and walking around a maypole.

Strother has compiled a sizeable collection of activities to keep kids active, which he acknowledges is one of his objectives. While kids may not have played or heard of some of the games, many adults will nod with nostalgia at the familiar activities. Not all the games are known by the most familiar name, so reading the description is sometimes necessary to grasp the main idea.

Five levels of activity—from low to intense--make it easier to choose an appropriate game for a given setting. Each game is also presented in an easily readable format with headings for the number of players needed, age level, time allotment and playing area. Equipment required and the goal are also clearly defined. A short Comments box at the end of each entry offers variations to the game or the author’s personal impression of the activity.

Adventurous seems an over-
rated term to describe the contents of this book. While there are plenty of outdoor games represented in this book, some are actually not games. Other activities are so common as to hardly merit an entry. Readers may enjoy the sentimental journey some games may trigger. This book would be most useful to children’s workers, camp staff, and homeschool families.

Karen Schmidt

PAP: 1602600546, 9781602600546, $14.95
vi, 258 p. : ill. (chiefly col.) ; 23 cm.

AdultRating: 4
We live in the age of diversity. Contemporary Christianity is being called to respond to different faiths and often we react out of our own ignorance. With this in mind, Len Woods wrote Handbook of World Religions: A Bible-Based Review of 50 World Faiths. Trained as a journalist, Woods applies the skills of a reporter to the task of providing an objective review of these faith traditions. In uniform fashion, Woods provides a short history of each group, a basic statement about core beliefs, a simple introduction to worship formats, and a calendar of significant holy days. In addition to the basic content of each chapter, Woods provides a quick reference chart detailing the differences between Christianity and each faith tradition.

Handbook of World Religions has a lot to offer and can serve well as a textbook or reference work for both secondary and post-secondary courses. The text is very informative and diverse. Woods reviews all of the major world religions, but also includes room for lesser known traditions like Rastafarianism, Wicca, Baha’i, and Sikhism. In addition to diversity, the text is objective and presents each religion without affirming its beliefs or negatively criticizing it. This allows the reader to develop his or her opinion about each religion.

While Handbook of World Religions is a very usable reference, its weakness is in the area of sources. Woods relies primarily on internet based sources. The average reader will appreciate the ability to locate most of these sources, but the more advanced scholar will long for classical sources. In addition, Woods uses few Biblical references for a text with “Bible-Based” in the title. The text is useful, but if the reader is looking for a Biblical refutation of these traditions, this is not it.

Monty M. Self
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