Dear Readers,

Sorry to be so slow with this issue, but the date for hip replacement surgery arrived before I had the issue finished. However, our team of reviewers has been hard at work, and we hope to have the April issue out in about two weeks.

Offering a free one year subscription has brought many new readers to CLJ. We welcome you and hope you find the journal helpful in selecting books for your library or for your own reading. Please continue to tell others about the free subscription.

In Christ’s love,

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

Nancy L. Hesch
Editor & Publisher
Mark L. Ward
Webmaster


Published in the U.S.A. © 2010
Review Rating System

*5 Outstanding—a beautifully written book which impacts someone's life or thinking
5 Excellent—well written, among the very best
4 Good—definitely worth reading
3 Fair—to be read for relaxation or to meet a need 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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HBB: 9781590787458, $17.95
PAP: 9781590787458, $9.95
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

My Special Day at Third Street School is a bouncy rhyming story about an author’s visit to a school. The students are excited with the preparations. They read all of the author’s books, draw pictures for the walls, prepare lemonade, and bake a cake. Soon Miss Amanda Drake arrives by bus. She shares with the class that her writing doesn't seem like work because she loves what she does. She makes the students feel special by holding their class pets and likes the idea about writing a story about their visit, which is what this book is! The best part of the visit is that she inspires the students to write. The students even rename the class snake “Amanda Drake.”

Eve Bunning shows how fun and inspiring author visits can be. She also shares how writing is truly more than work. This is a colorful picture book to introduce children to author visits and learning about authors. Teachers and librarians could read this before their own school’s author visit. Suzanne Bloom’s detailed illustrations are done by gouache, colored pencil, and crayon. She definitely captures the scene inside a classroom from the teacher's messy desk to the decorated walls of a lower elementary classroom.

Tina M. Cho


HBB: 9780395720950, $16.00.
E 30 p. : col. ill. ; 27 cm.
INT (PRI) Rating: 4

So Far from the Sea is a touching story about little Laura and Thomas Iwasaki’s family paying their last respects to their grandfather’s grave at Manzanar War Relocation Camp. Their family is moving from California to Massachusetts. Thomas is too young to remember their former visits to this Japanese relocation camp from World War II, but Laura remembers Father’s stories. Her father was eight years old when he was brought to this place. Her grandfather, a tuna fisherman, hated being so far from the sea he loved. Dad answers Thomas’s many questions about why Japanese were brought here. Laura remarks, “I see he is holding Mom’s hand. Thomas doesn’t hold anyone’s hand. He must feel the scariness of this awful place, too.” Mother has brought silk flowers for the grave, and Laura even brought something significant as a surprise to her father.

Eve Bunting again tells a wonderful historical fiction story. This is a beautiful picture book to introduce children to this horrible event that took place in American history. Chris K. Soentpiet's watercolor paintings vividly capture the expressions of the people and the camp. The paintings take up a full page and a half. When Father is reminiscing, the paintings are black and white. This is a great read for all who love history.

Tina M. Cho

One is a feast for a mouse: a Thanksgiving tale, 1st ed. / by Judy Cox ;

HBB: 9780823419777, $16.95
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.

PRI Rating: 4

Too tired from eating the huge Thanksgiving feast, Dad, Mom, and Cat take a nap while the kids play outside. Mouse creeps out his hole to see what food remains on the table. In One is a Feast for Mouse: a Thanksgiving Tale, Judy Cox tells about Mouse, who though satisfied with one morsel, becomes tempted to take a feast. He balances his growing mound of food—until caught by Cat. Told in a fun spirit, young readers are encouraged to participate with this progressive tale that adds only one more food item to each page.

Jeffrey Ebbeler’s acrylic paint, pastels, and color pencil on paper illustrations add to the humorous text with caricature style drawings from a mouse’s perspective. His whimsical drawings will tickle giggles out of readers.

The focus of the text envelops fun, silly humor sprinkled with dabs of thankful spirit. Little readers are sure to love Mouse’s character.

We recommend this picture book for kids with giggles.

Mary Vee


HBB: 9780399252105, $16.99
B or 271/.302 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 25 cm.
PS (PRI) Rating: 5

The Song of Francis by award-winning author and illustrator Tomie dePaola, introduces preschoolers to the joyful spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis is alone except for a small angel who follows him everywhere and calls him “Little Poor One.” Yet Francis is so filled with the love of God that he begins to sing. “Come and bless the Lord, because the Lord loves you.” The sun and moon and birds of all colors join him in the glorious song. The sun eventually leaves the sky, but God’s love remains in the silence. And Francis promises to sing again tomorrow.

The illustrations in this heartwarming book are as exuberant as the text. DePaola creates a colorful collage on every page by painting watercolor backgrounds on 100% rag bristol paper and adding Avery labels painted with Prismacolor markers. The angels in the story who come to listen to Francis sing all resemble a very young dePaola and might appeal to a wider audience if they were as diverse as the birds and plants and stars. Still, this is a book that all children and parents will love to read together and read again tomorrow.

DePaola carefully crafts his words and art into a story that speaks directly to the hearts of children. A child who is feeling lonely will know that God’s love is always with him. Like Francis, he can surround himself with love by loving everything around him. A child who is feeling happy will naturally celebrate along with Francis. Parents will rejoice in the peaceful, nurturing atmosphere The Song of Francis generates. This is a wonderful read-aloud book for bedtime or anytime. The language is simple enough for young readers to follow and quickly be able to read for themselves. This book is intended for children ages 3-5 years (Putnam Juvenile/Penguin Group website).
Laurie A. Gray


PAP: 9780310715665, $4.99
Fic 92 p.: ill.; 20 cm.


PAP: 9780310715665, $4.99
Fic 93 p.: ill.; 20 cm.


PAP: 9780310715689, $4.99
Fic 93 p.: ill.; 20 cm.


PAP: 9780310715696, $4.99
Fic 95 p.: ill.; 20 cm.


PAP: 9780310715719, $4.99
Fic 95 p.: ill.; 20 cm.


PAP: 9780310715702, $4.99
Fic 95 p.: ill.; 20 cm.

Natalie sees the world and tells her stories through the eyes of an observant five-year old—not always understanding everything, making generalizations and assumptions that a child perceives in her narrow world. Readers will immediately compare Dandi Daley Mackall’s Natalie with similar characters in other early chapter books—especially Junie B. Jones (series by Barbara Park) and Clementine (series by Sara Pennypacker). Unfortunately, Natalie lacks the original charm of these characters and her adventures are more commonplace. Nevertheless, young readers will connect with Natalie as she grows up in a Christian home filled with prayer and forgiveness, and encounters ordinary problems most children face at one time or another as they grow. Each book deals with a specific issue in Natalie’s life related to her growing independence—messes related to cooking and coloring the bathroom, her desire to star in the Christmas play, starting kindergarten, friendship and secrets, the dilemmas associated with sharing a birthday with a classmate, and the addition of a new brother and puppy to the family. Each story about Natalie focuses on how her character grows and copes with challenges and change.

With eye-catching covers and delightful black and white drawings within the text to support the story, purple-loving Natalie is certain to attract early chapter book readers. With age-appropriate vocabulary, Natalie is a lovable character whose imperfections and fast-paced activities are fun for readers to follow. Whether or not first and second grade children will be interested enough in a kindergarten-age
character to read the entire series is another question. Supporting characters, especially the bully-like school children, are predictable and flat. Nonetheless, *That's Nat* is a welcome addition to the early chapter book genre for girls offering a good alternative to fairies and other magical fantasies.

*Kristine Wildner*
The Knights of Arrethtrae series follows up on Chuck Black's previous Kingdom Series, a medieval-style allegory of the gospel. The Knights of Arrethrae series builds on this allegory, as each book examines a practical aspect of the Christian life.

In *Sir Kendrick and the Castle of Bel Lione*, Sir Kendrick and his apprentice, Sir Duncan, attempt to learn about a new order of evil knights. Duncan and Kendrick travel to the town of Bel Lione, where many youth have disappeared after Lord Ra's festivals. The quest turns disastrous when Duncan enters Lord Ra's castle to protect a friend. Although less clear in this book, the main theme seems to be loyalty, both to God and to other believers.

*Sir Bentley and Holbrook Court* acquaints us with young Sir Bentley. After he swears allegiance to the Prince (Jesus), Bentley takes up a mission to help the oppressed and poor. But Bentley can't hide his identity for long. Bentley becomes a prisoner, and the Mercy Maiden, a mysterious woman who helps the people, is banished by Sir Avarick. This second novel examines the problem of greed and the solution of mercy.

*Sir Dalton and the Shadow Heart* introduces Sir Dalton while he's still in training. Doubts that begin under a weak tutor continue to plague Dalton through his early missions. Lord Drox, the Shadow Warrior behind Dalton's doubts, finally imprisons Dalton. This book communicates the problems doubt may cause if we don't deal with it properly. It also shows how we strengthen our faith by knowing who and what we believe.

The writing style leaves a little to be desired. Black often labels feelings and expressions (astonishment, confusion, sorrow, etc.), instead of painting a vivid scene that allows readers to come to their own conclusions. Furthermore, the characters often seem flat, especially in the first two books. *Sir Dalton* moves beyond these shortcomings to a degree but could also benefit from more showing, less telling, and increased character development.

Even so, the adventures in each book do present some exciting moments. And each book includes further resources. Study questions help readers think about the story and dig into their Bibles. Each volume also contains an
original music score (a different song for each book). Best of all, each novel contains answers to the study questions, so if you or the kids get stuck on an answer, you can benefit from the author's perspective.

Although the Knights of Arrethtrae series may not offer standout writing, it does succeed in putting faces to abstract concepts such as greed, mercy, doubt, and faith. Further discussion could turn these novels into excellent teaching tools.

*Rachelle Dawson

**Family reminders / Julie Danneberg ; illustrated by John Shelley. Watertown, Mass.: Charlesbridge, 2009. LCCN 2008049659.**

HBB: 9781580893206, $14.95  
Fic 105 p.: ill. ; 22 cm.  
INT Rating: 5

Mary McHugh's happy family life is shattered by the shrill of a mine's disaster siren in *Family Reminders*, a beautifully written story set in the 1890s town of Cripple Creek, Colorado. Mr. McHugh loses more than his leg in the accident—to Mary's dismay, he no longer smiles, sings, or piano-dances. Mary finds comfort in her Reminders, wooden figurines her father carved to celebrate both special and ordinary events. The Wedding Reminder is "a carved likeness of Mama and Daddy on their wedding day." Another Reminder is a figurine of Mary that her father carved after she picked raspberries on a hot summer day.

As the weeks past, Mary tires of waiting for her dad to be happy again. She encourages him to pick up his carving knife and he begins making more Reminders. When the owner of Brown's Emporium buys Mary's Reminders, she helps her dad see that he is an artist. Music spills from the piano again.

Teacher and author Julie Danneberg's great-grandfather lost his leg in a mining accident. But she wisely allows *Family Reminders* to be Mary's story. The young girl narrates the events, interspersing them with happier memories from before her father's accident. Illustrator John Shelley's ink drawings hark back to the frontier days and are an entertaining accompaniment to Ms. Danneberg's delightful prose.

*Johnnie Alexander Donley

**The magician's elephant / Kate DiCamillo ; illustrated by Yoko Tanaka. Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2009. LCCN 2009007359.**

HBB: 9780763644109, $16.99  
Fic 201 p.: ill. ; 21 cm.  
INT Rating:*5

A simple fantasy filled with love, promises, and forgiveness, Kate DiCamillo's latest novel begs to be read again and again; each time gaining a deeper appreciation for the depth of the story and beauty of the language. Set in a fictional European town in the 1800's, *The Magician's Elephant* begins with Peter, an orphan, having his fortune told and learning that his sister is alive and that an elephant will lead him to her. At the same time, a magician has conjured an elephant to fall from the sky, injuring an old woman. Eventually, the magician is imprisoned, and the elephant is put on display.

Other characters connect the lives of both Peter and the elephant—his neighbor, a policeman; a singing beggar,
and the elephant’s caretaker, formerly an artist. When Peter finally meets the elephant, he knows he must set her free. Meanwhile, Peter’s sister Adele is living in an orphanage; she too feels drawn to the elephant. As Peter keeps his promise, he is finally reunited with his sister.

The essence of this story lies with DiCamillo’s unique ability to capture the deepest feelings of her characters—promises unfulfilled, broken dreams, yearning for greater meaning. The setting—the dark of the winter and the wonder of the first snow—functions as a unifying force just as the elephant’s presence awakens a sleepy town and bonds a family broken by the memories of war and loneliness. Throughout, Yoko Tanaka’s charcoal illustrations bring the characters to life, conveying the emotions of the characters at critical plot junctures.

Best appreciated by thoughtful readers, The Magician’s Elephant is, perhaps, best read aloud to children, inviting them to periodically reflect. Not explicitly Christian, the values expressed within the story harmonize with biblical morals and lend themselves to religious connections.

Kristine Wildner


HBB: 9780822579656, $16.95
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 29 cm.
INT Rating: 4

After a long day of working and sweating in the cotton fields, the plantation slaves sneak away. Simmy, the young storyteller in Hush Harbor: Praying in Secret, describes the hush harbor as “a hidin’ place deep in the woods” where they can worship God. Hidden away from the prying eyes of their owner and overseer, the slaves sing and dance, praising God the way they want instead of like the white folks. Praying in the hush harbor gives the slaves the strength to face another long, hot day in the fields.

During the nighttime prayer meeting, Simmy is given the responsibility of being the worshippers’ scout. Though frightened, he climbs up into the branches of a tree and keeps watch for the cruel slave owner and the overseer. These men don’t like the slaves to meet together. They are afraid that the slaves would make plans to escape. When Simmy hears dogs barking, he has to warn the others.

Award-winning author Freddi Williams Evans’ story is rooted in historical events. In an “Author’s Note” at the end of the story, she explains how the earliest Southern black churches grew from the hush harbor meetings.

The writing is almost lyrical, though Simmy’s dialect includes excessive apostrophes (dropped prefixes and suffixes) which tend to detract from the reading. Erin Bennett Banks’ beautiful illustrations are bold, with a primitive quality and muted palette that enriches the narrative. She has also won previous awards for her illustrations.

Johnnie Alexander Donley

Moxy Maxwell does not love practicing the piano: (but she does love being
HBB: 9780375839153, $12.99
LIB: 9780375939150, $15.99
Fic 91 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.

HBB: 9780375842702, $12.99
LIB: 9780375945526, $15.99
Fic 159 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
INT Rating: 4

Moxy Maxwell is a spirited, savvy 10-year-old dealing with a variety of difficult situations. She lives with her mother, stepfather, and twin brother, Mark. Even though she means well, it's not unusual for her to wait until the last minute and let deadlines sneak up on her. That's when her mother reminds her that there are "consequences" for her actions. Before the end of each book, everyone in the family gets involved in some way.

Gifford’s writing style is conversational and readable. She breaks the action down into lots of brief chapters to keep the reader engaged. Sometimes, the chapter title is the entire chapter. In others, the chapter is a single sentence or two. She uses Moxy’s brother, Mark, as the book’s “photographer” to document all the things Moxy gets involved in.

In Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Writing Thank You Notes, Moxy is faced with missing a trip to Hollywood to visit her father if she does not finish writing all her Christmas thank-you notes in one day. She is so excited about her trip and deciding what she will wear to the New Year’s Party in Hollywood that she ends up in the middle of a big mess before dealing with a big disappointment.

In Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Practicing the Piano, Moxy decides to do everything but practice her part of the duet she is supposed to perform in the recital. She wants the chance to perform for lots of people but may miss the chance to perform at all. While she’s not practicing, she is busy designing recital costumes and warming up her voice, just in case she is asked to sing. Will she practice in time so she can bow for the audience?

Gifford captures what it's like to live with a 10 year old. Moxy isn't trying to be difficult or disobedient, but she does get caught up in her own desires. She definitely has a mind and an agenda of her own. Ultimately, the books have good conclusions and provide entertainment in

HBB: 9780316114271, $16.99
Fic 278 p. : col. ill. ; 20 cm.
PRI INT Rating: 5

In Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin, Minli, a young Chinese girl, lives the difficult life of a peasant. She and her parents work hard in their fields with little to show for it. But her father’s stories and legends bring light to their gray existence and Minli finds herself believing the tales. She sets off on an adventure to find the focus of these stories, the Old Man of the Moon, so that she may learn how to change her family’s fortune. Along the way, she encounters a down-on-his-luck dragon, greedy monkeys, a vicious tiger, talking fish, and a host of magical, mystical events, while learning what she truly values and where wealth really lies.

Grace Lin crafts a fairy tale in the style of Grimm mixed with The Wizard of Oz, based on Lin’s experiences with Chinese folklore. The book consists of Minli’s story interwoven with a series of tales told by the characters on her journey. At first the tales appear unrelated and almost irrelevant, but Lin neatly ties them together to create a unique subplot.

Simple language, larger print, and the author’s own illustrations make this a novel that can be read to mid-elementary ages or read independently by older elementary children. However, some of the language breaks its magical feel by using modern-tinged words and phrases. They alter the mood that has transported the reader to rural China. Fortunately, these instances remain in the minority.

The characterizations of Minli and her parents are heartfelt and genuine with a unique cultural perspective that is both colorful and authentic. This is a charming book that demonstrates a mastery of simple elegance, overflowing with a sense of wonder.

Jaclyn S. Miller

PAP: 9781434765260, $14.99
Fic 426 p. ; 19 cm.
INT (MS) Rating: 4, with caution

After Zac’s mother dies as a result of lightning, the ten-year-old becomes an orphan, and is taken home by two elderly Aunties who abuse him mercilessly. With this gloomy introduction, The Blue Umbrella reveals the isolated and fearful life Zac faces. His situation worsens after meeting Dada, an evil man who demands that Zac steal a blue umbrella owned by store keeper Sky Porter. Zac has watched Porter from his bedroom window, and is given hope and a sense of reality in his presence. Zac gets a job at the store, supposedly to steal the umbrella, and endures beatings from the Aunties each day he fails to do so.

A hugely diverse array of characters, with Sky as the one ray of hope, weaves through the story, along with intriguing weather occurrences, as Zac seeks a way out of his miserable situation. His intentions
intersect with Sky and the seemingly magical umbrella, with amazing results and new hope for his life.

Labeled fantasy for children ages 9-12, Mike Mason’s *The Blue Umbrella* is a dark and difficult story. Mason obviously enjoys telling a complex tale with strong characters and vivid settings. His descriptions and use of weather as metaphors are skillfully written. However, the dismal storyline with a host of malevolent personalities and harsh situations at every turn is disheartening. The overall feel of the story is bleak and ugly. While many fantasy novels may feature fearsome characters and fearsome situations, *The Blue Umbrella* tends to ring more true to life than most fantasies. Not until the end of the 425-page novel does the redemptive element come clear. An author interview adds insight into Mason’s ideas about the story, and a seven-page glossary defines many of the words this age group may not understand. Parents might choose to read this book first, or read it aloud with their child. Middle school and older readers might find it most enjoyable.

Karen Schmidt

LIB: 9781580891875, $16.95
PAP: 9781580891882, $7.95
383/.143 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

A bright, colorful, informative picture book, *Mule Train Mail* relates the true story of Anthony Paya, the postman who every day, no matter what the weather, starts at the top of the Grand Canyon’s South Rim with a mule train packed with mail plus all the goods needed for daily living, and travels for three hours down the narrow, steep trail to the Havasupai Indians living in the village at the bottom. Not only is the canyon grand, so are the captivating, daily adventures of this postman.

Writer/illustrator Craig Brown made the trip with Anthony Paya in order to give a true account of this intrepid postman’s daily work. Starting with the cover, *Mule Train Mail* is all illustration, with the narrative imbedded nicely onto each colorful page. Having ridden the Grand Canyon mules down to Phantom Ranch, I took great joy in recognizing in these illustrations and narrative the scenery and adventures I experienced on my trip.

Made with pastel and colored pencils on gessoed paper, the illustrations glow with reality. This book is wider than it is high and the author has utilized this by sometimes turning the pictures to take full advantage of the width to show the height of the canyon walls. The words always go the direction of the picture. A simple, complete narrative, majoring on Anthony Paya, his mules and dog, and the village and people, attractively provides the intriguing data. Very useful for the social studies group, *Mule Train Mail* will also make a nice read aloud or to oneself book and will be valued by elementary school pupils and workers in home schooling, public, and private schools.

Donna Eggett

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LIB: 9780822576440, $16.95
B or 970/.004/97 32 p. : ill. (some col.) ; 26 cm.
INT Rating: 5

Sold into slavery at the age of five from an Indian tribe of 150 members by another Indian tribe, the Yawaputt boy grow up as a white man. His new father, a kind Christian man, enables him to feel safe and supports him through the years. Eventually the boy becomes a doctor.

Dr. Montezuma spent the last 12 years of his life fighting for his ancestral people’s right to remain on their homeland. Interestingly, one year after his death in 1923, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act whereby all Native Americans became US citizens.

Photographs from his time and original paintings by Capaldi, who has written or illustrated nearly thirty children’s books, add an inviting visual journey in this story. The story reads well in the classroom setting and can be shared by parent and child together as they explore the experience of Native Americans in early American history. Left or right columns on about one-third of the pages add real life excerpts and historical antidotes. A lot
is squeezed into the book and the reader gets a good description of the historical tribes and their locales and can more easily relate to modern Indians. 

Leroy Hommerding


PAP: 9781439591178, $12.99
520 128 p. : col. ill. ; 28 cm.

INT Rating: 4

Part reference book, part activity book, Leap Into Space is a well-developed introduction to the world of space and the science associated with it. The book begins with an explanation of what space is before moving on to chapters on the solar system, sun, stars, moons, comets, and the space race.

Throughout the book, there are plenty of activities/experiments for students and teachers to complete on their own. Special attention is paid to vocabulary, actual photographs, and relevant diagrams to illustrate specific concepts. Two sections featured throughout the book are Tools of the trace and The Fact of Space. The tools section discusses specific instruments and techniques used in the science/exploration of space. In The Face of Space, contributions and accomplishments of historical figures in space study are highlighted. Several women are noted for their contributions in these sections.

The book contains numerous colorful illustrations that complement the text nicely. Unlike a “chapter book”, this can be read a couple of minutes at a time or at an entire sitting. The last section of the book includes several pages of resources (websites, books, glossaries, etc.) that make it as valuable a reference tool as it is enjoyable to read.

There are a couple of minor problems. First, there is some slightly outdated information contained in the chapter on moons. The text mentions “the next total eclipse is projected to occur in August, 2008.” Obviously, that date has passed. Second, the word “satellite” is misspelled in a heading in the chapter on comets and flying space matter.

Overall, the book is easily read, appropriately interactive, and an excellent resource for introductory study of science and space.

Rachel Langston

Your body battles a broken bone / by Vicki Cobb ; with microphotographs by Dennis Kunkel ; illustrated by Andrew N. Harris. (Body battles) Minneapolis, Minn. : Millbrook Press, 2009. LCCN 2008002837.

LIB: 9780822574682, $25.26

INT Rating: 5

With photographs by Dennis Kunkel and illustrations by Andrew N. Harris, Vicki Cobb has energizing visual props to illustrate and accompany her Your Body Battles a Broken Bone. Cobb’s narrative tells the story of how different parts of the body work as a team to heal broken bones. Six superheroes, whose cartoon illustrations can help entice the more reluctant reader, involved in this process—osteoblasts, blood cells, neutrophils, macrophages, fibroblasts, and stem cells—enable a child to
understand what is going on his or her body when a bone is broken. A glossary clarifies terms and the well-written text makes the process understandable.

The photomicrographs that illustrate the text offer photos, taken with a scanning electron microscope that magnify the bone healing journey in a manner that provides a good grasp of the science involved, while also highlighting features that teachers or parents can utilize when reading the story with children.

Those familiar with Broken Bones (Capstone Press, 2006) geared for primary grades will find this title a natural complement written for intermediate children. Cobb has over 85 entertaining non-fiction books for children to her credit. Harris has training in illustration and graphic design and it adds to the presentation while Kunkel’s award-winning images add depth to the presentation as he is considered one of the world’s experts on microscopy.

*Leroy Hommerding*

**Sam Patch : daredevil jumper, 1st ed. / by Julie Cummins ; illustrated by Michael Austin. New York: Holiday House, 2009. LCCN 2007034624.**

LIB: 9780823417414, $16.95
791/.092 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
INT Rating: 4

*Sam Patch: Daredevil Jumper* will capture the attention of a wide range of readers due to vivid phrasing and exciting facts told in the tone of a tall tale. Julie Cummins has dug deep into the history of nineteenth-century New York to share the life of a local hero who became a popular daredevil entertainer. Michael Allen Austin’s acrylic paintings add a folklore feel to the historic details behind the legend of Sam Patch.

Born in 1807, Sam was a “born jumper” throughout his youth. He jumped from fences, ladders, roofs, bridges—ever taller heights. Eventually he made the leap from jumping for fun, and his first leap as a showman took place in Patterson, New Jersey, on September 30, 1827. Where a crowd had assembled to watch the placing of a bridge across the gorge, Sam jumped 70 feet from a cliff into the river. This stunt earned him the nickname The Jersey Jumper, and he repeated it the following July. Now he publicized his daredevil jumps, each a greater risk than the last. He soon became a national hero, known for his showmanship and the dark sash worn around his waist. His highest jump was 120 feet from Niagara Falls. He planned to repeat this stunt but increased the height to 125 feet by building a platform over the falls. The day of the feat, Friday, November 13, 1829, was raw and blustery. Despite a bold speech, Sam made the jump but never surfaced in the river below.

A historical note, source notes, and a selected bibliography make this a strong addition to any collection. This story is both entertaining and a great way to open discussion about little-known history for young readers.

*Lisa A. Wroble*

HBB: 9781590786086, $17.95
973 1 v. (unpaged) : ill. ; 28 cm.

INT Rating: 3

When British soldiers are sent to keep the peace in the colonies in North America, tensions run high between loyal British subjects and the Sons of Liberty. Timothy Decker shares the story of The Boston Massacre in For Liberty and illustrates his work with beautiful, detailed pen and ink drawings.

The art work throughout the book is truly impressive. The story, however, can be a little difficult to follow. For readers that have some prior knowledge of this event in American history, the book will reinforce their knowledge and show them a different portrayal (with the black and white drawings). For readers with no introduction to The Boston Massacre, some of the text may be confusing. Decker includes names of British soldiers and colonists that might not be familiar to everyone. One name that is familiar is John Adams. His roles as a lawyer in the massacre trials and future American hero are highlighted at the end of the book. This does help make the connection between this event and others leading to the revolutionary war.

There are numerous drawings that demonstrate Decker's talent and skill. Additionally, he creates cut-away sections on some pages to show close up details in some of the battle scenes. The best part of this book is, by far, the detailed art work. Regardless of the story, that makes it worth reading.

Rachel Langston


HBB: 9780316053181, $17.99
636.7/0092/9 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill., maps ; 23 x 29 cm.

PRI (INT) Rating: 5

A heartwarming story of friendship in Iraq between a stray dog and an American soldier is the basis for Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine & a Miracle. Writers Kirby Larson and Mary Nethery relate how the dog, whose external ears had been cut off to make him a “dog of war,” and Major Dennis encounter each other outside an Iraqi military fort. After they quickly bond, Nubs became Dennis’ constant companion during the brief times when the Marine is at the Iraqi location. Later Nubs follows Dennis’s Humvee back across the desert to the American base. Dennis collects donations to ship Nubs back to the U.S. where they now continue their unique companionship.

Nubs is a war-time story with a satisfyingly happy ending. The chronological storyline makes the narrative easy for young children to follow. Full-page photos set on colorful background pages are descriptive, though tender-hearted children might be disturbed by a few of the photos showing the scrawny dog shivering in the snow. Text is interspersed with photos and call-out quotes or e-mail facsimiles for visual variety. Simple maps and the few photos of military vehicles.
and rolling barbed wire fences give youngsters a tiny taste of the Mideast and the life of soldiers overseas. The story will grab readers’ interest and empathy; the comprehension level is adequate for primary children as a read-aloud.

Karen Schmidt


PAP: 9780939217649, $8.99
743.6/.9772 64 p.: ill. (some col.); 28 cm.
INT (PRI, MS) Rating: 5

Novice artists and those with a keen interest in dogs will find useful instruction in 1-2-3 Draw Dogs: A Step-by-step Guide. Author Freddie Levin starts simply, showing three basic shapes and dictating 4 brief guidelines. Then she leads the artist literally step by step through forming the outline of the animal, adding detail, coloring, and shading. The 22 dogs are divided into categories by size, breeds, and type. A short paragraph about each dog begins the two to three page drawing tutorial and describes interesting facts or unique traits.

Dog lover Freddie Levin’s drawing instruction is logically presented and easy to follow. Finished drawings of each dog are easily recognizable, yet not so perfect that beginning artists would feel incompetent by comparison. A note to parents and teachers offers ideas on how to adapt the instruction for younger children; despite the simplicity of the book’s design and text, the information is suitable for older students and even adults. As a starting point, 1-2-3 Draw Dogs is a helpful title for beginning art studies, homeschoolers and those who love dogs.

Karen Schmidt

HBB: 9780823420865, $16.95
PAP: 9780823422449, $7.95
Fic 298 p.; 22 cm.
MS Rating: 4

A Difficult Boy is the poignant story of Ethan, an indentured servant, in 1839. Sold by his father into servitude, young Ethan faces more strife than any nine-year-old should have to deal with. At Mr. Lyman's, he just can't make himself at home. Although Mr. Lyman appears to be a God-honoring, honest tradesman, Ethan has suspicions about his bookkeeping. Mrs. Lyman is always at Ethan to keep clean, and chores constantly wear at him. But more troublesome than anything else is the difficult Irish teenager, Daniel, with whom he has to work.

But soon Ethan begins to see what has made Daniel so hard—the ill use he suffers at Mr. Lyman's hands. It's not long before Ethan also faces beatings and unjust words. Survival draws the boys together, and they learn to lean on each other through the hard times.

The details of life on the farm are reminiscent of earlier historical fiction, though the subject matter is grittier than most. Milking cows, sleeping in attics, riding horses, planting, and harvesting are described in apt detail. The characters are lively and likeable, especially the kind-hearted Ethan. The plot, though slow at times, keeps you wondering what Mr. Lyman has to hide.

This engaging story of friendship through trials is a great look into the life of an indentured servant.

Ellie Ann Soderstrom


PAP: 9781414323091, $6.99
Fic 267 p.: ill., 19 cm.


PAP: 9781414323107, $6.99
Fic 253 p.: ill., 19 cm.


PAP: 9781414323114, $6.99


PAP: 9781414323121, $6.99
Fic 283 p.: ill.; 19 cm.


PAP: 9781414323138, $6.99
Fic 309 p.: ill.; 19 cm.
MS Rating: 3

Tyce Sanders has the distinction of not only being the only human to not have ever been to Earth, he is also the first human to be born on Mars. The year is 2039 and Tyce is fourteen and relates his life as a member of the Mars Colony Project through journals. For his first fourteen years he is the only young person living in the colony, due to his mother and father unexpectedly falling in love and getting married during the eight month passage to the colony. Tyce's unexpected birth creates many complications, which is part of the reason his legs are paralyzed and his days are spent in a wheelchair. Since each member of the colony
must be useful, Tyce is trained in virtual reality, allowing him to operate a robot that assists in missions, maintenance, and rescues. His virtual reality abilities and his growing faith in Jesus are the main focus of the five part series Robot Wars.

Fans of Sigmund Brouwer’s writing might initially be delighted at the prospect of a new series; however, upon reading the first book, Robot Wars, it becomes clear this is not new territory. In fact, Robot Wars is actually the repackaging of the series Mars Diaries, which came out about ten years ago. Very little, if anything, has changed within the plot structure, and the only real noticeable change is the new afterwords contributed by Brouwer concerning science and faith.

One big problem with the repackaging is some of the major plot points are in great need of updating. It hardly seems feasible, as the series is set in 2039, that there would be a crucial need to form a Mars colony due to overpopulation and lack of resources on Earth. Also some of the situations, characters, and vernacular lack credibility: e-books are no longer a new concept; hoodlums betting on horses seems laughable, and expressions like “cool” are jarring they are so out-dated.

Brouwer is adept at writing a story full of plot twists and scientific information making this series an enjoyable read. It’s hoped Brouwer will apply his talents to a new series, providing his readers with the freshness they have come to expect.

Pam Webb


PAP: 9781554690473, $9.95

Fic 163 p.; 18 cm.

HS (MS) Rating: 4

Matt Carr wants to be a normal teenager, but unfortunately he’s stuck in a weird family. His father, a science teacher with a large collection of reptiles, often dresses in kilts. His mother is a police dispatcher who wants so much to be a detective; she actually tries to solve their cases. And his computer-whiz sister has orange and purple hair. But all that becomes less important when Matt’s soccer team starts losing, and even that becomes meaningless once Caleb, their star player, disappears, possibly because he was kidnapped by his abusive father.

Maverick Mania is a snappily written story with lots of action and a good balance between the soccer and the mystery. Sigmund Brouwer’s writing style is short and sweet, with no wasted words, and should hold the interest of reluctant readers. Matt is a nicely drawn character, although his friends and family are less developed, and the “abusive father” angle is resolved a bit simplistically (as is Matt’s sudden appreciation for his “weird” family). However, Matt’s detective work while trying to find his missing teammate Caleb is realistically portrayed; the scenes showing his and Caleb’s inevitable capture by the villains are suspenseful without having the boys take needlessly dangerous risks.

Religion is subtly woven into the story, through scenes of Matt’s family attending church, Matt wondering what God wants us to do on earth, and Matt’s prayers for peace and clear thinking while...
trying to save Caleb from the villains.

Rosemarie DiCristo


PAP: 9781554690459, $9.95
Fic 185 p. ; 18 cm.
HS Rating: 4

Mike “Crazy” Keats, a 17-year-old hockey player, has an uncontrollable temper which has gotten him traded to four teams in three years. It’s not just on-ice fighting that gets him into trouble but also his self-destructive attitude off the rink. But Mike’s troubled childhood (his mother died in childbirth, his father is an alcoholic) has left him unable to trust anyone. That changes when he meets Native American teammate Dakota Smith, who is not only the target of racist taunts but seems to be deeply involved with a gang of vicious thugs.

Like Sigmund Brouwer’s other sports novels, Thunderbird Spirit is fast-moving with lots of sports action, a suspenseful mystery, and realistic, likeable characters who are supremely loyal to each other. Mike, Dakota, and Dakota’s sister, Kendra, are richly drawn, and the way they grow by story’s end is convincing. Religion comes through Dakota’s before-game prayers, and the boys’ detailed discussion of the meaning of faith. For readers who may be unfamiliar with hockey, hockey terms are noted with an asterisk within the story and defined in a glossary at the beginning of the book.

Thunderbird Spirit is simply written, making it accessible to young readers, but certain plot points make it most suitable for high school readers. There is violence: Dakota’s truck is shot at and burned and the family dog is nearly poisoned; he, Mike, and Kendra are tied up and left to die by the ruthless villains. More significantly, an incensed Mike gives a wedgie to a surly fan, there’s a joke about teammates wetting themselves, and Dakota and Mike lie to the police to keep the truth about the villains’ attacks secret. But the lessons the characters learn, their deep moral convictions, and the sense of goodness that pervades the story ably counteract any negatives.

Rosemarie DiCristo


PAP: 9780310715399, $9.99
Fic 221 p. ; 22 cm.


PAP: 9780310715405, $9.99
Fic 230 p. ; 22 cm.
HS Rating: 3

Shaley O’Connor, a 16-year-old girl whose mom, Rayne O’Connor, is a famous rock star, seems to live the ideal life, traveling the country with The Rayne Tour. But reality is different. Shaley’s mother is preoccupied with her career and Shaley has never met her father (Rayne O’Connor got pregnant at seventeen). Then a member of the Tour is murdered by a man who knows Rayne’s past... and wants to hurt Shaley.

The Rayne Tour, a two-book suspense series for teens written by Brandilyn Collins and her daughter Amberly, is a grim series. The first murder takes place seven pages into Book One, Always Watching, and while it
happens off stage, the victim’s bullet-ravaged face is graphically depicted, and described again and again as a distraught Shaley can’t forget the horrific image. A second murder is nearly as graphic. First person scenes narrated by Shaley are interspersed with third-person accounts from the insane murderer, which are downright creepy. While Shaley’s longing for a father is poignant, this is a mystery-suspense book, meaning plot is favored over characterization. There’s no real sense of Shaley’s personality, her friend Brittany has little effect on the plot, and the members of the Rayne Tour are interchangeable. Even the murder victim isn’t fully developed since he’s killed before the reader can know or like him.

The suspense scenes build as the story progresses, and Book One’s climax, where Shaley trusts the murderer over her bodyguard, moves swiftly, but Shaley doesn’t do any detecting and mostly observes the events happening to her. While Always Watching ends on a cliffhanger (the dying murderer’s final words are a clue to Shaley’s father’s whereabouts), Shaley’s search for him makes up the entire plot of Book Two, Last Breath, and the “search” consists of her questioning the hospital-bound Rayne as to his identity, and extended flashbacks to Rayne’s teen years when Rayne was courted by the mysterious Gary Donovon. Collins tries to ratchet up the suspense by interspersing third-person viewpoint scenes from a man who seemingly wants to kill Shaley, but not only does the device get shopworn the second time around, a careful reader knows from Book One that this new “killer” can’t possibly be out to kill anyone.

Shaley’s friend Brittany’s apparent ESP may raise questions for some readers, the “Gary Donovon is involved with a vicious street gang” subplot is more silly than forceful, and there’s no real feel of what it’s like to travel with a rock band. A Christian friend teaches Shaley that Jesus is “always watching,” the “Rayne gets pregnant” subplot is handled delicately, and the series tries hard to be special, but ultimately it’s a bit too average to be highly recommended.
concept of being comfortable with who she is and gains perspective through Liat's understanding of other people. She begins to be more appreciative of her parents, their hopes, and the challenges they face.

Junior high is like tip-toeing across a minefield for most, and Robin Friedman does a commendable job of portraying the emotional seesaw. She allows us access to still enjoyable childhood pleasures alternating with the terrors of fishbowl fear about what others are thinking.

The book is a wholesome read about innocence on the cusp of maturity. The character observes a couple making out on one occasion and receives a kiss when she is mistaken for someone else in the dark.

Some Israeli cultural elements are incorporated. Written Hebrew without vowels and ethnic food items are an everyday part of Roxanne's culture as she pines for junk food plus a way to look and be cool. TV shows of the 1980's are referenced with Wonder Woman and other superheroes used as fantasy role models. The chaos of adolescence is well-documented along with the complications of a bi-cultural identity.

Deborah Rabern


HBB: 9781590783894, $16.95

Fic 197 p. ; 22 cm.


HBB: 9781590786062, $17.95

Fic 306 p. ; 21 cm.

MS (HS) Rating: 4

The Second World War was difficult for everyone; not only for soldiers, but also for families at home. With the men at war, rations, etc., the lives of families were turned upside down. In addition, many Americans suffered from the devastating effects of the polio epidemic. Blue is the story of Ann Fay, a thirteen-year-old girl facing the consequences of disease and the war. Joyce Moyer Hostetter continues her story after the war in Comfort, depicting Ann Fay's father's difficult adjustment to civilian life and her recovery from polio.

In Blue, Ann Fay's father has gone to war. As polio hospitalizes her young brother and her mother goes to stay with him, Ann Fay's responsibilities grow. When her brother succumbs to the disease and her mother falls into depression, Ann Fay takes on the roles of both mother and father. Eventually contracting polio herself, Ann Fay moves into the local polio hospital. As she begins her arduous recovery, she befriends a black girl. Despite segregationist policies, the girls develop a strong friendship. Comfort continues Ann Fay's story. With her father suffering from war neurosis and Ann Fay home on crutches, life is better in many ways, but worse in others. He is distant, sometimes violent. Sponsored by a generous neighbor, Ann Fay moves to Warm Springs Foundation to recover. Life is nearly perfect for Ann Fay in Warm Springs; she receives the best of care with patients her own age. Finally, she has a chance to be herself without the worries of her family or differences of her disability. When her father's condition worsens and her mother
expects another baby, Ann Fay
returns home. Drawing on her
own positive experiences with
people suffering the same
condition, she realizes her
father needs the support of
other veterans. The image
and symbolism of the color
blue and the word comfort
carry throughout. Blue is the
color of the beautiful, yet
strangling wisteria, a
description of the sadness of
Ann Fay’s family, and a
statement of the prejudice
ingrained in the lives of the
Southern people. Comfort is
an ephemeral feeling,
something to be grasped at
but which often disappears in
the face of the suffering.

As the endnotes explain, the
circumstances of the books
are historically accurate. The
colloquial language of the
South adds to the feeling of
time and place. Although
there are heart-wrenching
moments, they are balanced
by other hopeful and happy
moments.

Kristine Wildner

_So Not Happening_ / Jones,
Jenny B.  (A charmed life
novel)  Nashville, Tenn. : Thoma
PAP: 9781595545411, $12.99
Fic 328 p. ; 21 cm.
HS Rating: 4

So Not Happening describes
Bella’s ruptured life. From a
New York penthouse and
private school to a farm in
Oklahoma is a whiplash of
culture shock. Her mother’s
marriage via internet romance
plunges Bella into the middle
class without her celebrity
father’s credit cards, her
friends, and shopping.

Bella rants in a blog to her
former classmates. By the
next day her new school
mates, including the teachers,
quote snide snippets back to
her. Bella’s desperate prayers
for God to just bring on the
Rapture are not happening.
Meanwhile, her new
stepfather’s presumed
nefarious activities arouse her
suspicions, and she vows to
unearth his secret.

A school newspaper
assignment requires Bella to
lurk in a dumpster. While
hidden she overhears a
conversation that leads to an
investigation of the football
team. She and her editor go
undercover to expose a
dangerous, ruthless
brotherhood.

Jenny B. Jones wrings every
ounce of comedy from her
teen-age drama queen who is
nosy, suspicious, opinionated,
and the possessor of a
sympathetic heart. Awkward
family adjustments involve
weird stepbrothers, new rules,
farm animals, and sharing
bathrooms.

The author opens a window
on the teen party scene
without graphic detail. Although
part of Bella’s socializing includes hanging
out at a teen dance club,
drinking is not condoned.

Bella’s character growth is
subtle. Rebellion against her
mother and altered lifestyle
subsides. She gains a better
understanding of family
values, the meaning of
friendship, and develops a
deeper relationship with God.
Suspense centers on the
mysteries of her stepfather’s
secret, and the bizarre
behavior of those involved in
covering up the past while
manipulating the future.

A guide at the end invites the
reader to self-examination
with thirteen questions
regarding materialism, pride,
relationships, and attitudes.

Deborah Rabern
Good dragons that praise the Maker and befriend humans, and a variety of characters, both good and bad, that travel between various dimensions provide the context for the Oracles of Fire series by Bryan Davis, a sequel to his Dragons in Our Midst youth Christian fantasy series. That earlier series includes Raising Dragons, The Candlestone, Circles of Seven, and Tears of a Dragon. There the author adapts elements found in Dante’s The Divine Comedy and expands further to offer a universe with portals from Earth into other dimensions such as levels of Hades. During the time of King Arthur, certain good dragons had been miraculously transformed into long-lived humans. In modern times, Billy and his friend Bonnie discover that they are anthrozils—both fully human and fully dragon. With their friends Walter and Ashley and their families, these two teenagers battle throughout this series against zealous dragon slayers out to kill all dragons.

The Oracles of Fire series begins in Eye of the Oracle, a chronological prequel to the earlier Dragons series, with a pair of good dragons on Noah’s ark. A genetically produced “underborn” girl Sapphira witnesses the destruction of the tower of Babel, befriends Elam the kidnapped son of Shem, and later is revealed as an Oracle of Fire. Certain key events surrounding these and related characters as they fight against evil forces in various dimensions bring the story up to modern times with Billy and Bonnie and their friends.

In Enoch’s Ghost, the evil scientist Mardon, son of Nimrod, and his accomplices, plan to draw Earth and Hades together as a step in their plot to reach Heaven and conquer it. In another dimension, Second Eden, a few of the godly allies present themselves as willing sacrifices in the battle against the evil schemes. Last of the Nephilim shows the havoc that giant Nephilim create on Earth and Second Eden as they strive to ensure the success of Mardon’s plan. In The bones of Makaidos, Satan incarnate and his pawns attempt to exploit the unsuspecting faithful Bonnie as their link to Heaven. Their defeat requires total commitment and willing sacrifice from Bonnie and friends.

In Dragons in Our Midst and Oracles of Fire,
author Bryan Davis has created an exciting and complex secondary world. Although the first Oracles volume is a chronological prequel to the Dragons series, it is good to read the Dragons series beforehand to develop context. In this fantasy world, a number of characters live more than a thousand years, a few characters experience temporary possession by spirits of other characters, and certain characters die and are resurrected to active life in different dimensions—rather than passing immediately to their eternal abode. Twenty-first century technology (e.g. cell phones and helicopters) coexists with unique science-fiction inventions and supernaturally powerful medieval-type weapons. Well-developed characters make mistakes and grow, whether humans, anthrozils, dragons, underborn, Nephilim, a talking horse, or even a super-computer with personality. In these fast-paced books, the omniscient narrator often shifts perspective among various characters—including some negative individuals—sometimes within single chapters, with accompanying variation in styles of conversation. Teenage characters occasionally refer to other works, such as Lewis’s Narnia and Tolkien’s hobbit books. Significant repeated themes include integrity in truthfulness and keeping promises, complete faith in God and commitment to His will, willing sacrifice for others, repentance followed by forgiveness and redemption, the value of prayer, and effectiveness of Scripture in defeating evil power. This detailed series bears re-reading to pick up on foreshadowing. With few, if any, inconsistencies over eight volumes, this series along with its precursor has a positive Christian message and is very definitely recommended for youth and adults who appreciate this genre.

PAP: 9781576582886, $8.99
B or 266/.0092 189 p. : ill., map ; 21 cm.
MS (INT HS) Rating: 4

C.T. Studd gives up everything for the sake of the gospel, according to C.T. Studd: No Retreat by Janet and Geoff Benge. Studd, a famous cricket player in his youth, sacrifices his athletic career to become a missionary to China. When he inherits a large sum of money at age 26, Studd gives it all away so the money will not tempt him to forsake his calling. Eventually Studd moves to India and finally to the Belgian Congo. Studd’s determination to share the gospel with people who’ve never heard it guides every decision he makes.

The Benses have done an excellent job boiling down several decades of a man’s life into a readable length and theme. This biography reads like a coherent tale, not just a selection of anecdotes. Most chapters end with a hint of foreshadowing or a hook to raise curiosity about what will come next.

Studd’s life challenges readers to pursue a strong faith in God and a passion for sharing Christ’s story. His story also offers examples of failure. He allows denominational differences to cause strife in his mission organization; the disagreements lead to a split both in the organization and in Studd’s own family. While the Benses offer a few comments, the majority of the time, they report the facts of his life and leave readers to draw their own conclusions.

Rachelle Dawson


PAP: 9781576583045, $8.99
B or 276.2 190 p. : 21 cm.


PAP: 9781576583821, $8.99
B or 287.092 191 p. : map ; 21 cm.


PAP: 9781576581469, $8.99
B or 278.66 189 p. : map ; 21 cm.


PAP: 9781576583852, $8.99
B or 823/.912 191 p. : map ; 21 cm.


PAP: 9781576584750, $8.99
B or 940.54/2521674092 221 p. : map ; 21 cm.

MS (Adult, HS) Rating: 5

YWAM’s ongoing softcover biography series about contemporary and past Christians whose lives have been instrumental in evangelism and missions is top notch reading for preteens. Each book begins with a dramatic or significant
slice of the featured individual’s life, effectively capturing a reader’s interest. The rest of each book chronologically presents the person’s youth, conversion, God’s guidance into their vocation and how God changed the individual and others through their work. The Benges provide cultural details, emotional elements, and colorful anecdotes to flavor each story. A simple black and white outline map precedes the first chapter to orient readers to the character’s primary setting. A short bibliography follows the end of each story to offer additional age-level reading choices.

The Benges are consistent in their style of writing and how each biography is presented; readers familiar with the series will have a clear view of how the character’s life will be laid out. Plentiful dialogue, colorful cultural descriptions, and storytelling expertise give high readability to each biography. Preteens as well as teens and even adults will gain insight and inspiration from the lives of committed followers of Jesus who abandoned themselves to the vision God gave them.

Lillian Trasher: The Greatest Wonder in Egypt relates the inspiring incidents that directed an unsuspecting 17-year-old young woman from Georgia into orphanage work, first in the U.S. and then to Egypt. Trasher’s tenuous faith and tender heart nurtured thousands of African babies and children into adulthood.

John Wesley: The World His Parish relates the difficult life Wesley often lived, from his strict upbringing to his itinerant preaching across England and into the new America. Wesley’s involvement in launching the Methodist movement that became the denomination is explained also.

Jim Elliot: One Great Purpose picks up Elliot’s life story as he leaves California for Ecuador at age 25. This biography is focused specifically on Elliot’s aim to take Christ to the unreached Auca tribe in the Amazon jungle. Occasional brief flashbacks fill in details of the past; abundant details give vibrancy to the story about how Elliot and his four colleagues lived and died to take Christ to the Aucas and spurred missions around the world.

C.S. Lewis: Master Storyteller uses a third person narrative to relate the author’s arduous schooling experiences, entrance into academia, and finally his success in writing. Readers can be encouraged and heartened by Lewis’ vulnerabilities and situations relating to faith and interpersonal relationships.

Jacob DeShazer: Forgive Your Enemies focuses almost solely on DeShazer’s adult life: his military enlistment, imprisonment by the Japanese, and his subsequent devotion to missions in Japan. Much WWII and subsequent history is intertwined throughout the story.

Karen Schmidt


LIB: 9780761420293, $39.93 947.56 144 p. :col. ill., col. maps ; 24 cm.

Newly updated editions of the Cultures of the World Series, Algeria, Armenia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Ukraine provide a comprehensive overview of each respective country. Well organized with text and photos, each book follows a similar format with chapters divided to cover geography, history, government, economy, environment, the people, lifestyles, religion, language, arts, leisure, festivals, and food. Subdivisions within chapters aid in scanning for key information; while pronunciation guides, recipes, folktales, biographical sketches, and significant event articles add interest and detail. Concluding with political/physical, economic, and cultural maps, as well as a timeline, glossary, bibliography, websites, and index, each book covers almost anything a student would want to learn about a country.

The authors all do an excellent job of explaining the interdependence of many aspects of life in each country, especially the relationship between government policies and the economy, and the environment. Although the books are written at a relatively high reading level, they do not assume the reader has prior knowledge and provide clear explanations of unfamiliar terms and events. Moreover, the books tie time periods together, explaining how ancient civilizations and traditions affect and are integrated with modern life. Most of the photographs are contemporary and reflect the country as it exists today, addressing the changing role of women, capturing the landscapes and architecture and most importantly portraying many views of the people living in each country. The series is perfect for students doing research on particular countries and also for people embarking on broader research on topics such as world religions, world-wide environmental concerns, general world history, etc.

We live in a time of continual change. This is especially true in countries who are now redefining themselves in the 21st century after years of oppression under Communist rule and other regimes. Current books on foreign countries are critical resources to teach our students not only the past, but the world-wide opportunities in the future.

Kristine Wildner

HBB: 9780791095737, $30.00
B or 813/.54 124 p.: ill. (some col.) ; 25 cm.
HS MS INT Rating: 4

Madeleine L’Engle by Tracey Baptiste chronicles the personal and professional journey of the Newbery-award-winning author of *A Wrinkle in Time*. Although she wrote fiction, nonfiction, and religious books, L’Engle rejected being portrayed as either a children’s writer or a Christian writer, insisting, “I’m a writer period.” L’Engle fans will appreciate the details of her childhood, acting career, marriage, and the overview of her published works with special attention to the Time Fantasy series and the Austin Family Series. Through plentiful quotes from L’Engle herself, the biography offers insight into the connection between her life, her stories, and the characters she created: “Every single one of my adolescent heroines is based on my own experience.” Baptiste also addresses the religious controversy that has surrounded *A Wrinkle in Time* as one of the 10 most banned books in the United States and L’Engle’s response that she felt honored to be listed alongside some of her favorite writers such as Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, and Anne Frank.

Baptiste’s biography is part of Chelsea House Publishers’ *Who Wrote That?* series on famous children’s and young-adult authors. Packed with information on both L’Engle’s life and work, this relatively thin volume is well-organized and easily accessible. Each chapter contains at least one telling photograph of L’Engle and a “Did You Know?” sidebar. Extensive appendices include a chronology of L’Engle’s life from her birth in 1918 until her death in 2007, as well as comprehensive timelines of her 42 published works and 16 major awards. Baptiste provides numerous endnotes and a lengthy bibliography; however many of these cite internet sources, some of which are no longer available online, and others which require registration to view. The biography does provide a valuable list of seven books and two websites for further reading. Overall, her facts seem to be accurate and well-supported, making the work suitable for high school students who simply want to learn more about L’Engle. Baptiste does a nice job of portraying L’Engle’s struggles and foibles as well as her virtues and success at an appropriate level for middle school readers.

*Laurie A. Gray*
Beyond this moment / Tamera Alexander. (Timber Ridge Reflections ; 2) Minneapolis, Minn. : Bethany House, 2009. LCCN 2008052073.

PAP: 9780764203909, $13.99
Fic 396 p.; 20 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Set in Colorado Territory in the late 1800s, Beyond this Moment tells the fictional tale of Dr. Molly Ellen Whitcomb. Once a professor of romance languages at Franklin College in Athens, Georgia, Molly has arrived in Timber Ridge to accept the position as their new schoolteacher. Given the choice of taking the job or having her indiscretion revealed, Molly knows there really is no choice. Unwed and three months pregnant, Molly makes the decision to purchase a wedding ring in Sulfur Falls and try to pass herself off as a widow. The residents of Timber Ridge welcome her with open arms as Molly struggles with her deceit and the carefully guarded secrets she is hiding from them. Timber Ridge's sheriff, James McPherson, knows Molly is hiding something, and when he learns her secret, it not only threatens to destroy Molly's life, but James' reputation and job are also at stake.

From the opening pages of Beyond this Moment, the second book in the Timber Ridge Reflection Series, it's clearly evident that Tamera Alexander has penned another award-winning historical fiction novel. From its realistic characters to its vividly depicted scenes to the storyline that grips its reader, Beyond this Moment stands well on its own without benefit of reading books one or three. The dialogue between the characters enables the reader to envision the scenes and feel what the characters are feeling. Ms. Alexander tackles the problems of prejudice, lies, and deceit, in addition to premarital sex and the consequences thereof, with courage and honesty. Bad choices by the main characters lead to secrets that are then exacerbated with more lies that are told in order to keep the secret hidden. God's grace, forgiveness, and mercy are a major theme in Beyond this Moment as well as are human love, friendship, and redemption. Teen readers will also enjoy this novel, as many of the themes and situations are things they still deal with today.

Sherri Myers

* *


PAP: 9780764203824, $13.99
Fic 311 p.; 20 cm.
Adult Rating: *5

Hope is something the Steward family knows little about when Leaving Yesterday opens. The family has already suffered the devastating loss of a child, and they now live in the hell created by the addiction of another child. Alicia and Rick's marriage has dissolved beneath the load of tragedy, and the entire family clings tenaciously to each new day by nothing more than sheer determination.

When hope comes shining through, in the form of a phone call from their son Kurt announcing his admission into a drug rehab program, the Stewarts family begins to take small steps back toward each other. However, these small, tentative steps toward normalcy suddenly take a
dark and dangerous turn. How far will this family go to protect this fragile new beginning?

Kathryn Cushman’s story is a haunting look at the difficult choices life brings to us. An unexpected tragedy, addiction, marital strife—these and many other situations place every Christian into the crucible of choice. As Christians, the Stewards trust their faith to bear them up and carry them through until they reach the other side of their particular sorrow. However, sinful humanity rises up against what they know is right, and sometimes leads them to face the heartache and penalty of wrong choices. Kathryn looks at this scenario through the desperate eyes of a parent whose child is lost in the horror of addiction.

Leaving Tomorrow takes the reader through a believable set of circumstances, and the ending is both hopeful and satisfying without leaving everything tied into a neat little package. Wrong choices come with consequences, and Kathryn Cushman does an excellent job of reflecting that truth without crushing the hope of a better tomorrow.

Kim Ford


PAP: 9781589191020, $14.99

Fic 283 p.; 21 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Scared follows two main characters, the grief-stricken photographer Stuart Daniels and the young orphan Adanna. The AIDS epidemic has hit the small African village of Swaziland. Stuart is on assignment to cover the epidemic, while Adanna is trying to survive the disease that has killed many of her family and friends. Stuart is constantly finding himself questioning God and why he would let this happen to his people while death and tragedy surrounds him.

It is after a horrific flood occurs and while Stuart stands in horror as he recognizes how immune people’s feelings are to death that he begins to wake up and start doing. “You are God’s vessel. You are the hands and feet of Christ, the hope of Christ to the people.” Those are words spoken to Stuart by a minister in the village after Stuart brings food and supplies back to the dwindling village. The words seep into Stuart and he soon begins to live by them daily in his journey to share the epidemic and wake up the rest of the world.

Stuart’s African travel is filled with vivid details, graphic abuse, dangerous encounters, and good friends. Throughout the novel, the reader can’t help but think that they are standing right next to Stuart and feeling his exact same emotions. Davis brings each character alive, making the reader feel as though they have known them for a while. Will Stuart grow to understand God’s plan? Can Adanna learn to trust after her world has been thrown upside down? Davis answers these questions with delicate honesty.

Kate Hensing


HBB: 9781595540072, $24.99

PAP: 9781595546111, $15.99
Daniel Clark will die three times before he stops serial killer Eve. Clark, a well-known and proficient FBI agent, has studied the patterns of Eve to the point of obsession. In fact, his dedication to the case has cost him his marriage, as well as his life. Clark barely survives the head shot he receives in pursuit of Eve and is haunted by panic attacks and the knowledge that he saw the killer’s face, yet cannot recall it. Put on medical leave, Clark is aided by another dedicated agent, Lori Ames. Together they get closer to catching the ruthless, psychotic killer; however, in catching him Clark may cause his former wife to become the next victim. Ted Dekker’s *Adam* is a page turning thriller that investigates the mindset of the hunter and the hunted.

Ted Dekker knows how to spin a tale of supernatural, spiritual intrigue. *Adam* explores the aspect of lost innocence and the emptiness of the soul when separated from God’s love and grace. The plot moves at a fast pace and throughout the novel is the inclusion of a magazine serialization focusing on the transformation of a boy who becomes a serial killer. This ingenious device works well in breaking up the plot’s tension and gives further exposition on the killer without slowing the pace. The story moves well until the final chapters, where the conclusion is weighed down heavily by an exorcism scene. The denouement could have been stronger, and actually appears weak, considering how strong the story is up to the ending. Those who enjoy Frank Peretti, and like an edge to their faith-based readings will want to add this new Dekker book to their list. Dekker fans will not be disappointed in this new offering, yet may question the heavy-handed emphasis on demon possession.

Pam Webb


PAP: 9781416583479, $14.99

Athol Dickson’s latest novel, *Lost Mission*, weaves back and forth between present day California and an eighteenth century Franciscan mission in Mexico. The scenes seem disconnected at first, yet as the story continues the behaviors of one place in history seem not so very different from what is taking place in modern times. *Lost Mission* is an exploration of what truly defines spiritual wealth. It is an exploration of man’s desire for peace and power and the evil that slips into his heart as he seeks something that seems to be for the good of all mankind. Cloaked in a surreal mist of familiarity, the reader passes from one story to another just as the smoke from the fires of days gone by pass amid the currents of the wind.

Lupe is a woman who feels compelled to leave her home in Mexico and witness to the lost, wealthy white people who inhabit the state of California. She carries in her arms an ancient relic from another time that represents the story of a Franciscan monk who also followed the Lord in an effort to reach others for the Savior. As Lupe’s story develops, the reader is given a glimpse back in time and allowed to follow the eighteenth century story of
Fray Alejandro—from whose hands the relic has passed over time to the modern Lupe’s story. There are times when the stories seem to meld together, and perhaps they really do in part, because the depravity of man and the desire for a human/Christian utopia is as old as mankind. The desire to reach these depraved men and women for the Lord is also an ancient calling, and the two desires war one with another throughout the pages of this story.

Lost Mission is set primarily among Catholic worshippers, thus much of the doctrine is based in their religious practices. Other than the “seeking for signs” mentality of some of the characters, the spiritual truth in the story is clearly stated and the gospel message is solid. Dickson tends to lean a bit toward the mystic element sometimes, and he weaves this within the story in a unique way without distracting from the story itself. Lost Mission is told uniquely in Athol Dickson’s style, and provides an interesting read.

Kim Ford


PAP: 9780764205958, $13.99
Fic 336 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 3

Aidan O’Neill, hotshot firefighter, makes a poor choice resulting in significant injury to a rookie. As Aidan steps back to reassess his life and struggles to regain his confidence after being suspended, a serial arsonist begins to wreak havoc in Reno. When suspicion is raised about Aidan’s relationship to the series of fires, he teams up with Julianne, a fire investigator; together they work to unravel not only the arsonist’s identity, but also the identity of the arsonist who set the fire that killed Aidan’s father. With closure on this issue, Aidan is able to begin to make his way back to renewing his relationship with God.

Shawn Grady’s debut novel, Through the Fire, introduces readers to a novelist whose work will be worth continuing to read in the future. His poetic prose style captures the audience from his opening description of fire, and carries throughout the novel in various settings and character depictions. As a firefighter and a paramedic, Grady’s experience bring to life many intense scenes of suspense in the novel, and instills readers with a broader appreciation for the dangers firefighters face each day.

Sherri Beeler


PAP: 9781601421661, $13.99
Fic 370 p.; 21 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

Piper Wick cannot begin to imagine the journey she sets herself upon when she agrees to return to Pickwick, North Carolina, at the request of her uncle’s attorney. Piper’s life as an image consultant in Los Angeles couldn’t possibly be further removed from her southern heritage and social status. However, when Piper finds herself in the arms of a very down-to-earth gardener, she is suddenly very aware of
her past and its possible effects upon her future.

True to the south and its unyielding death-grip on the past, Tamara’s cast of characters in *Leaving Carolina* seem to all be carrying their past—primarily their mistakes—around like so many battle scars. The entire Pickwick family is observed beneath the microscope of small-town gossip, and no matter how hard they try, it seems that someone is always around to cast dispersion upon their family name and remind everyone of the mistakes that took place years ago.

In this kind of environment, forgiveness is weeded from the lives of the Pickwick family just as thoroughly as the poison ivy is removed from the beautiful gardens surrounding the family estate. As the story progresses, first one member of the family and then another begins to realize that everyone has made their contribution to the family’s less-than-stellar reputation. One by one they begin to face their past mistakes and seek forgiveness from those they have wronged. Everyone is amazed at the changes that forgiveness and second chances bring about in this small southern town.

Piper Wick and her Uncle Obadiah provide a poignant reminder to readers that the future always looks brighter when they no longer allow past wrongs to cast their shadow over the desires of our hearts. They learn that God is always willing to forgive their mistakes if they will just go to Him in repentance. Axel Smith proves to be a pivotal part of sharing God’s grace and forgiveness with this quirky family, and no life is left unchanged by the end of the story.

*Kim Ford*

PAP: 9781555706760, $65.00 025/.00285 xv, 279 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.
Adult Rating: 3

As basic technology skills are a prerequisite for all staff in libraries today, the third edition of *Neal Schuman Library Technology Companion* seeks to be a one-stop overview of all technologies used in libraries today.

Librarians can find basic definitions, suggested applications and uses, adoption issues, and potential problems by way of troubleshooting. A companion blog is offered to stay updated on resources and materials and may be one of the best resources available in this guide.

Chapters discuss general concepts and while helpful for the novice, it does give the guide more of an academic feel than how-to directives. For libraries where staff gather to evaluate as a team, each chapter concludeing with questions for review will be valuable. Less time spent on the historical overview of current and past technology and more resources to evaluate the pros and cons of each technology or approach is recommended in future editions.

*Leroy Hommerding*


Pri Rating: 5


PRI Rating: 5


**Accept nothing less : God's best for your body, mind, and heart / Jim Burns. (Pure foundations)** Bloomington, Minn. : Bethany House, 2008. LCCN 2008028762.

PAP: 9780764202124, $12.99 649/.65 200 p. ; ill. ; 22 cm.
MS HS Rating: *5


Adult Rating: 4

Jim Burns, radio host and founder of HomeWord in 1985 with the goal of offering help and hope to struggling families, developed the Pure Foundations series to guide parents and their kids through the sometimes uncomfortable talks about their developing bodies and God’s plan for healthy sexuality.
God Made Your Body and How God Makes Babies in the Pure Foundation series are colorful read-to-me books to introduce children to the basics of sex from a Christian point of view. The books have sturdy, colorful covers with the interior pages printed on heavy glossy stock. Each page has its own concept and idea and the writing is warm and positive.

Burns encourages preteens to recognize that the decisions made today affect you for the rest of your life. The Purity Code is about a promise to live a life of sexual integrity and purity, and Burns makes no bones that it takes a lot of faith and self-discipline to fully live by the Purity Code.

The gamut of concerns is covered: what do the changes in my body mean? Am I old enough to date? How far is too far? What do I do if I’ve been sexually abused?

Burns doesn’t beat around the bush reaching out to teens. Accept Nothing Less focuses on relationships and sex, encouraging youth to offer their best, emphasizing that God’s best is more than just abstinence and involves the heart and mind as well.

Direct conversation with parents is Burns’ approach in Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality as he encourages and offers ways to aid parents in conversing with kids about sexuality. One can tell he’s talking from experience and that he recognizes that one approach doesn’t fit all.

Leroy Hommerding


PAP: 9780817015411, $16.00
248.8/45 192 p.; 22 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

In her book, Raising Boys To Be Like Jesus, Sharon Norris Elliott provides a simple, practical tool for any parent raising a son. She shares information that she gathered when she asked this question for her own family, “What can I do at this point in time that will help my boys become more like Christ?”

Each chapter describes a period of Jesus’ life and parallels his experiences with those of boys today. Elliott includes practical advice, personal anecdotes, and STEP ASIDE sections in each chapter for readers to customize information for their situations. The book is full of scripture references highlighting Elliott’s advice. This scriptural foundation is part of what makes the book such a usable reference and tool.

Elliott addresses all the issues that Jesus faced in his life. Thus, she addresses any situation that today’s parents and sons will confront. From dealing with friends to submitting to authority to managing money and relating to women, Elliott writes with the belief that “if we reform our parenting techniques, we can raise a generation of men like Jesus.”

Elliott does not apologize for her opinion that fathers (or “father figures”) have a vital role to play in the lives of young men. Having been a single parent for a time, she accepts the reality of boys growing up in homes without a fatherly influence. That experience makes her argument about the needs for “Josephs” in a boy’s life most compelling, even when that view is not always popular in our culture.

Being a godly parent is never easy. Raising a godly son offers unique challenges. Fortunately, parents of boys have Jesus as an example of
the kind of man they should be sending into the world. After reading Elliott’s book, preparing those men will be just a little easier.

Rachel Langston


HBB: 9780849901812, $24.99
PAP: 9780849921025, $14.99
222/4092 xiii, 233 p.; 25 cm.

Adult Rating: 5

I will admit I love the story of David and Goliath so this book appealed to me because of the title and because I think Max Lucado is a gifted storyteller. The very idea that I, an everyday person, can face and conqueror my Goliath is awe-inspiring. In Facing Your Giants: A David and Goliath Story for Everyday People, Lucado helps us understand that God already knows about our Goliaths and he wants us to focus on him and not on Goliath. If we focus on God and what a mighty God he is, then any Goliath by comparison is insignificant. Lucado uses the story of David and Goliath as a starting point for a variety of life lessons. He uses the relationship between David and Jonathon to define godly friendship. Abigail shows us the power of kindness and a gentle heart. The list goes on and on.

Lucado has the ability to present deep spiritual truths in a simple way. His gift as a storyteller enables him to lead the reader to a deeper understanding of God and how he loves and provides for his children through the use of stories. Lucado allows us to look at Bible stories with new eyes and renewed understanding. His writing is well researched and footnoted. Each chapter can stand alone and would make a great daily devotional. Throughout the chapters Lucado takes striking phases or thoughts and highlights them in print for the reader. There is also a study guide in the back of the book. The book is easy to read and Lucado reinforces every important life lesson presented.

Mary McCoy


CDR: 9781932213294, $129.95
220 1 computer optical disc ; 4 3/4 in.

Adult Rating: 5

This Bible-study software from Word Search Corp is an essential addition to both family and library reference collections. The program, provided on CD-ROM, is compatible with Microsoft Windows versions 98 or higher. It works very well in both XP and Vista operating systems, though some features do not work without an internet connection, including regular updates.

The program provides an easy-to-use interface to guide Bible study or research on a variety of topics. Twenty classic works of Christian literature, such as Pilgrim’s Progress, Power through Prayer (and the other works of E.M. Bounds), and In His Steps plus 13 versions of the Bible along with 10 commentaries, 8 Bible handbooks, 6 dictionaries and encyclopedias, theology resources, and other study and research guides can be searched in the “library” or read as individual e-books. Greek and Hebrew audio pronunciations are also available, but do not work on Windows 98 and ME computers. Maps, photos, and select woodcuts aid in understanding the facts or events contained in the reading.
Upon opening the program, users have the option of entering the “library,” joining a discussion (internet connection required), creating a Bible-reading plan, or selecting from three devotionals. The reading plan includes a calendar and ability to track reading progress, but only one can be created at a time. The devotionals include links to referenced verses, allowing for thorough cross-reference and study. Searches, by specific topic or of selected books in the library, include links to the electronic books and allow for multiple open windows as the sources are reviewed. Users can highlight text and add personal notes, which are saved in each book.

Additionally, 1300 compatible volumes are available through the Bible Explorer website.

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