Christian Library Journal

Animals of the Bible
For Young Children

Marie-Hélène Delval
Illustrated by Aurélia Fronty

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**Cover:** Animals of the Bible, by Marie-Hélène Delval; illustrated by Aurélie Fronty. Book cover image used by permission from Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.
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, 9780807547021, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 22 x 31 cm.
PRI Rating: 2; not recommended

Elizabeth is a bundle of energy. She dresses up, makes a lot of noise, and has a vivid imagination. Sometimes she is mischievous. One morning at preschool, she pushes Joe Fitzhugh and sets off a chain reaction of children falling down and knocking things over. Children fly everywhere. Everyone is upset; Elizabeth apologizes, and the children go outside to play.

Mara Bergman’s simple story, told in a rhyming voice is geared toward a very young child, perhaps one who is going to nursery school for the very first time and needs to learn to settle down. Lively Elizabeth is beautifully illustrated with pink plaid details on the cover, and brightly-colored drawings of multi-cultural children. The pictures convey a fine sense of movement to accompany the text. Unfortunately, the story is not very creative, or even interesting. For the most part there is no consequence to Elizabeth for pushing. The children look a little scared, Elizabeth shows some remorse, and that’s about it. Not recommended.

Kristine Wildner


HBB, 9780736927178, $12.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 19 cm.
PRI Rating: 4

With catchy rhymes and accompanying illustrations P.K. Hallinan presents ways children can live for God in I Love You, God. The song-like rhythm carries the message throughout the book and though some of the words are a bit advanced, the bright, friendly drawings easily explain the concept.

A simple book, yet it carries an important message, one that adults can gain from as well. This is an outstanding book for Sunday School classes, and makes for an excellent introduction to the ways children can enjoy living for God by their loving acts.

Pam Webb


HBB, 9780525423034, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 27 cm.
PS Rating: 5

This captivating book by Alison Jay takes you on a colorful, wonderful walk through the world of nursery rhymes.

The rhyming prose connects each nursery rhyme to a color—Old Mother Hubbard’s cupboard is orange, the Owl and the Pussycat’s boat is green, Little Bo Peep’s sheep are white, etc. The rhymes are easy to follow and fun to read aloud.

The amazing illustrations have an old-world feel about them and are intriguing to look at again and again. They chronicle the young boy’s journey through nursery rhyme land, giving hints at the next rhyme in the background of each illustration. Every picture is a detailed work of art.
This imaginative book is a fun way to introduce colors. It’s highly recommended.

*Ellie Soderstrom*


HBB, 9780310716419, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. Ill. ; 24 x 28 cm.
PRI Rating: 4

A classic medieval setting with a princess, a king, and valiant knights grabs little girls’ attention straight away in Karen Kingsbury’s *The Princess and the Three Knights*. The princess is ready to marry, and many young men aspire to become her prince. Her father, the king, stages a competition involving feats of strength, demonstrations of courage, and their thoughts on loyal and faith. Finally, three knights are remaining in the contest for the princess. The king devises a test to sift out the one best suited for his virtuous daughter. He who prevails proves his selfless and loving character to the king and the princess, and they live happily ever after.

Amid flowing illustrations by Gabrielle Grimard, the classic tale of a true soul who earns the trust and hand of an innocent young lady is sweetly played out. Kingsbury uses her skills of developing drama and emotion to just the right pitch before revealing the climax and carrying the story through to a satisfying conclusion. She plainly depicts how character wins out over physical or mental achievements and adds veracity to the Scripture, 1 Corinthians 13:4,7, that precedes the story. Young girls will adore the blond princess in her pink gowns and trust the wise, stoic king. With an adult’s help, they will also absorb the moral lesson.

*Karen Schmidt*


HBB, 9780307446459, $11.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. Ill. ; 23 cm.
PRI INT Rating: 4

Donita Paul and her daughter, Evangeline Denmark, present a delightful, inspirational picture book about Padraig, a kitten-size dragon, and Roger the turtle who camp outside together in the dark. Vincent Nguyen uses colorful pictures to illustrate the story of the two unlikely friends facing their fears to brave the unknown.

*The Dragon and the Turtle Go on Safari* tells how the friends spend the night outside together at the foot of Mount Sillerymanborrow. They roast marshmallows over the fire and share a box of baked bugs until Padraig, startled by a noise, knocks them over. Roger reassures him, never making fun of him, and their night continues. As they hear more unfamiliar sounds throughout the evening, they encourage one another with rational explanations. Roger wants to tell Padraig a story, but they decide it might be too scary and to wait until morning. They fall asleep, only to be awakened by the sound of a baby leopard stuck in a tree. They choose to set aside their own fears and rescue him, even if it means leaving the safety of their tent.

This book includes “*The Legend of Mount Sillerymanborrow*”—the story
Roger never got around to telling Padraig, as well as discussion questions to share with children. It’s based on Deuteronomy 31:6 (“be strong and courageous. . .God goes with you) The story would be a good way to teach children not to make fun of another’s fears and to recognize God’s presence.

Carol R. Gehringer


HBB, 9781596434028, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : ill. ; 23 x 25 cm.
PRI Rating: *5

Early each morning the elderly Amos McGee rises to meet the day and catch the 6 a.m. bus to the city zoo. While at work, the zookeeper visits his animal friends—plays chess with the elephant, races the tortoise with the elephant, races the tortoise with the rhino’s nose, sits with a penguin, and reads to an owl. One day Amos feels too sick to go to work so the animals take the bus to his home and repay his kindness.

A Sick Day for Amos McGee, the Caldecott Medal Book for 2010, is written and illustrated by a husband and wife team. Erin Stead, the illustrator, uses woodblocks to stamp soft-colored images onto the page and then draws over them with pencil. At first glance, the illustrations convey simplicity and peacefulness—a perfect complement to the text. Yet as the reader lingers over each picture, delightful details emerge. This book (Erin Stead’s first) is also a 2011 Charlotte Zolotow Honor Book and made the New York Times list of Best Illustrated Children’s Book for 2010.

Philip Stead writes a charming story about an elderly gentleman, Amos McGee, who greets the day with enthusiasm. He follows the same cheerful routine each morning—swinging out of bed, dressing in crisp clothing, preparing his oatmeal and tea, and catching the morning bus. Once at work, Amos senses the needs of each animal and spends time with them in a way that makes them happy.

This sweet story exudes respect for the elderly and provides a wonderful example of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Carol Satta


HBB, 9780763641689, $16.99
E 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 23 x 28 cm.
PRI Rating: 5

It’s bedtime and little red Chicken begs Papa for a story. As the title suggests, Chicken has a problem with interrupting stories. Despite her earnest declarations that she’ll refrain, chicken can’t resist jumping into the middle of three fairy tale stories (“Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Chicken Little”). Will Papa ever get to finish a story and tuck a sleepyhead in bed?

Ezra David Stein uses watercolor, water-soluble crayon, china marker, pen, opaque white ink, and tea to create the bold yet nighttime-hued illustrations for this 2010 Caldecott Honor Book. The panoramic double-spread title page shows a warmly lived-in home complete with magnetic letters and a coloring picture proudly

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displayed on the refrigerator. Toys and dropped food scattered about the floor hint that the little inhabitant is quite a handful! Stein switches to sketchy, sepia-toned pictures for the fairy tale storybook pages and crayons on lined paper to show Chicken's own artwork.

This book will evoke chuckles and warm feelings from children and adults alike that have experienced both the challenges and incredible bonding power of shared bedtime reading. David Ezra Stein says that he will “never forget the experience of sitting in a beloved lap and having a whole world open before me: a world brought to life by the pictures and the grown-up’s voice. That wonder is what I want to recreate in my own books.” (http://www.davidezra.com/). Mission accomplished.

Carol Satta

Mike Thaler continues his “Tales from the Back Pew” series for children ages 6-9 with The Three Wise Guys. Three boys take part in a Christmas play at their church, and get carried away by their imagination-fueled antics. As they do the assigned parts in the play, they put a spin on the nativity with inventions from the modern world. Trying to keep King Herod from finding baby Jesus, the boys come up with some unique ideas to thwart his plan and save the baby.

Jared Lee's full-page artwork is consistent throughout. The boys find themselves in Bible-day scenes with funny remarks from street vendors and townspeople. Children ages 6-9, especially boys, will find this book hilarious. It may even cause them to research more about the truths of God, church, and the Bible.

Juanita Wier Nobles

The three wise guys / by Mike Thaler ; illustrated by Jared Lee. (Tales from the back pew) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zonderkidz, 2010. LCCN 2008038672.

PAP, 9780310715931, $4.99

HBB, 9780811866927, $14.99
Fic 131 p.: ill.; 19 cm.
PRI Rating: 3

Best friends Ivy and Bean are collaborating on a global warming project for the second grade science fair, but so far none of their ideas are working. Ivy + Bean What's the Big Idea? is the seventh book by Annie Barrows about this comical duo. The girls try all sorts of schemes but when they finally look at the problem from a new perspective, they find success in the simplest of plans.

The energetic Bean and her quiet friend Ivy (who loves dinosaurs and aspires to be a witch) run through one experiment after another, ultimately finding a solution in their own schoolyard. Most of their ideas (such as throwing ice cubes in the air to cool the atmosphere) seem preposterous, even for seven-year olds. The girls briefly play a game called "bad orphanage" which involves playing the part of a cruel orphanage matron, and some of their thoughts include words such as "dumb", "stupid", "weirdo", and "wacko". The book’s best moments are the lessons offered by encouraging teacher Ms. Aruba-Tate: that kids are great at coming up with new ideas, and that for some problems there may be not be a perfect solution, but lots of little ones.

The ending is sweet, and an addendum contains a good explanation of global warming and why some of the ideas in the book would not work. The lighthearted pencil sketches by Sophie Blackall are effectively placed to illustrate the girls’ antics. The many pictures will help keep younger readers engaged in this fairly lengthy chapter book, which is intended for ages 6-10 (publisher’s website).

Nina Ditmar


PAP, 9780921100515, $9.95
Fic 123 p.: ill.; 22 cm.
INT Rating: 4

Nine-year old Bobby Falois travels to Pakistan with his mother and siblings from their home in the Netherlands to join his father who is working on an environmental project. Bobby's Friends is the story of Bobby's adjustment to a new culture, the vastly different friendships he makes, and his family’s reliance on faith to see them through some unexpected challenges.

Bobby’s Friends was originally published in The Netherlands in the 1950s. The formal language of the English translation, along with the time setting of the story, and the passage of time since it was written, give it a different feel. Bobby’s new friends in Pakistan are a mix of rich and poor, Christian and Muslim. His experiences include getting into a fistfight, riding a camel, attending a lavish Ramadan party, and being kidnapped.

Throughout the book, God’s Word guides Bobby as he navigates his new surroundings—a land of extreme poverty, beautiful mosques, pathan nomads, and oppressive customs. It is a
tender moment when young Bobby prays with his friend Jahja, telling him that Jesus is always near. His mother’s words serve to remind us of “the task we have as Christians toward everyone God puts on our path.” With a number of plots going on, characters with hard-to-pronounce names, mysterious behaviors that are not fully explained, and a sprinkling of words in Dutch and Urdu, the story is suspenseful but can be difficult to follow. A few pencil sketches (unattributed) help to clarify some of the action.

Nina Ditmar


HBB, 9780807509104, $14.99
Fic 123 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.


HBB, 9780807509128, $14.99
Fic 131 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.


HBB, 9780807509111, $14.99
Fic 128 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.

The Buddy files: the case of the fire alarm / by Dori Hillestad Butler; pictures by Jeremy Tugeau. (Buddy files ; 4) Chicago: Albert Whitman, 2010. LCCN 2010004326.

HBB, 9780807509135, $14.99
Fic 132 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.

INT Rating: 4

King (known as Buddy) is a loveable golden retriever, and a detective. He’s learned how to solve mysteries with his human, Kayla. Regrettably, Buddy finds himself in the P-O-U-N-D, and then in a new human family, Connor and his mom. In each of the first four books of The Buddy Files, Dorrie Hillestad Butler uses Buddy’s voice to tell a different mystery story, building suspense until a climatic ending answers all the questions. The conflicts are simple—a lost boy, a dog mix-up with the wrong owners, his missing family, and a school mystery about bullying and telling the truth.

Buddy’s character exhibits some cute mannerisms; for example, all human food is his “favorite” and whenever he tries to count, he always gets mixed up and uses the number “eleventy.” The author builds a sense of anxious anticipation as Buddy finds himself in seemingly impossible situations, but always finds a way to escape. His approach is always logical (for a dog), listing what he knows and doesn’t know. Although some of the situations can be a little scary, the happy endings always make the reader feel better.

Printed in a relatively large font, the series is written at a 3rd grade reading level. The fun black and white illustrations break up the text and add to the humor of each story. Butler truly captures the heart of a dog in the character of Buddy, as he is always loyal to his humans, interested in the world, and makes friends easily wherever he goes. Appealing to both boys and girls, The Buddy Files is a terrific introduction to the mystery genre and sure to be popular, especially to kindergarten - 2nd grade children who are independent
readers. The straightforward plot lines make it easy for children to retell the story, making these books a good choice for book reports. The fifth book in the series, The Case of the Library Monster, was released in February, 2011.

Kristine Wildner


HBB, 9780763613730, $16.99

Clarice Bean tries to find some peace and quiet in her yard but gets interrupted by the boy next door. Later, she gets mad at her brother and dumps spaghetti on his head. She gets in big trouble! But she’s kind of happy about her punishment . . . being sent to her room alone.

In Clarice Bean: That’s Me, Clarice introduces her family as she searches for peace and quiet in her busy house. Because Clarice shares a room with her younger brother, she struggles to find a place to be alone. Clarice tries to find some peace and quiet in her yard but gets interrupted by the boy next door. Later, she gets mad at her brother and dumps spaghetti on his head. She gets in big trouble! But she’s kind of happy about her punishment . . . being sent to her room alone.

In Clarice Bean: Guess Who’s Babysitting? Clarice suggests her Uncle Ted as a babysitter when her mom gets called out of town and her father is on a business trip. Uncle Ted? He’s Mrs. Bean’s younger brother and a firefighter. Clarice says he’s “very cool”. Clarice’s mom is not convinced that he will be the best babysitter but she agrees to let him come with “very strict instructions”.

Uncle Ted agrees to the six specific instructions, and things go well . . . at first. On day three, the school guinea pig gets lost, Clarice’s brother has to go to the emergency room, and Grandad wanders out of the house. While Uncle Ted calls his friends at the fire station for help, Mrs. Bean returns from her trip and finds chaos. Everything ends okay, but having Uncle Ted as a babysitter is quite an adventure.

These books should appeal to variety of readers because of their simple plot, lively characters, and visual format. In some ways, they may appeal more to reluctant readers because the reading is so well incorporated into the artwork. The problems presented are simple, believable, and solved without complication. Undoubtedly, the books will appeal to elementary readers, but also to older readers!

Rachel Langston


HBB, 9780802797827, $14.99

Abigail Iris: the pet project / Lisa Glatt and Suzanne Greenberg;
Abigail Iris is a lively, spirited third grader who lives with her parents, two half-brothers, and one sister. Sometimes Abigail Iris wishes the budget wasn’t so tight and the family wasn’t so big. That’s when she has ideas about what she would do if things were different!

In Abigail Iris: The One and Only, Abigail wishes that she were an only child, like her three best friends. When she gets an invitation to go on a spring break vacation with Genevieve and her family, she jumps at the chance. During the vacation, Abigail Iris gets to experience many things that she has never done before—staying in a fancy hotel; ordering room service; and shopping for authentic satin slippers in Chinatown. She even gets lost inside the hotel! When the trip is cut short, Abigail spends the rest of the week with her own family on their camping trip. Instead of still wishing she was an only, she discovers that being one of many makes for a happy spring break.

In Abigail Iris: the Pet Project, Abigail wants a kitten as a “half-birth-day” present. While trying to convince her mother, she explains “The Onlies don’t just get birthdays, they get half-birthdays too.” When Abigail falls in love with a kitten at the farmer’s market, her mom agrees to ask her dad if they can adopt it.

Just in time for her “half-birth-day”, Spot comes to live with Abigail Iris and her family. Everything is going great with the new addition until Victoria, Abigail Iris’ older sister discovers she’s allergic to cats. So they must get rid of the cat. However, there is a solution that makes everyone happy, even if it is a little unconventional.

These stories portray a blended family rather idealistically. While that makes for a good story, it’s not realistic. Abigail Iris can come across as manipulative when trying to talk her parents into something.

Overall, the books are enjoyable and easy to read.

Rachel Langston
her pony keep up with her friend Riley's faster horse. She just can't foresee what will happen as a result. Even her ride on Riley's horse Midnight ends in near disaster, but a quick prayer helps, and Andi learns you can talk to God anywhere.

In Andi's Indian Summer, Riley reads a story to Andi. It's a scary dime novel about Indians capturing settlers that makes Andi a little jumpy. When she and Riley go for a horseback ride, they get lost. A family of Indians rescues them, and Andi learns that stories don't always tell the truth about real people.

Author Susan Marlow starts a new series that is a great introduction to chapter books. Each volume begins with a list of ten new words and their definitions to help the young reader. The stories divide into ten short sections with a concluding peek at the past to clarify the differences between the 1870's and today.

The books include at least one black and white sketch per chapter, along with a cameo at the head of each one. The drawings by Leslie Gammelgaard make charming additions to the narrative. Coloring pages and learning activities, available from the website, will add value to your child's reading experience. Once again, Susan Marlow has a winner.

Deborah H. Rabern


HBB, 9780310718130, $14.99
Fic 174 p. ; ill. ; 22 cm.
INT MS Rating: 3


British teens Peter and Julia wonder if their earlier journey to Aedyn was a dream. When two annoying step-sisters join their family after their father remarries, Peter and Julia decide to run away. They fall into a river and find themselves back in Aedyn—followed by their whiny stepsister Louisa!

The children discover that Aedyn has fallen into disarray. The people have been captured and are working as slaves, digging a deep tunnel at the base of a volcano. The deeper they dig, the more the earth trembles. No one seems to know what they are digging for. To find out, Peter travels back home to locate a jewel that fits into Julia's necklace. Louisa has a vital role in the story—she sings the words to the ancient prophecy that unravels the mystery. The three children must find the courage to free the slaves, and bring them back to Aedyn before the volcano explodes.

Character and plot development appears rougher than in the first book and the ending is rather abrupt. The character of the Lord of Hosts is underdeveloped and mentioned briefly; otherwise the spiritual overtone is more allegorical.

There are many parallels to The Chronicles of Narnia: British children visiting another world, a whiny relative, Oxford professor as author, and differing entries into this world.

This book is geared towards ages 9-12 years of age, although middle school reads will like it as well.

Carol R. Gehringer
HBB, 9780374370558, $16.99
Fic 149 p.; 19 cm.
INT Rating: 3
Barbara O'Connor’s The Small Adventures of Popeye and Elvis captures the essence of long summer days and the anticipation of a “small adventure” to spark new life into a lonely boy. Popeye (nicknamed after a BB gun accident) lives with his grandmother and his irresponsible uncle Dooley. One day, an RV gets stuck in the mud nearby, and to Popeye’s happy surprise, it is filled with children. He immediately befriends a boy his age, Elvis, who is quite Popeye’s opposite—who uses salty language and is never afraid to try something new. Together, the boys look for an adventure, exploring their rural surroundings in South Carolina. One day, while playing near a stream, the boys discover a paper boat made from a Yoo-hoo carton and a message. As the days go by and they explore further form home, they discover more boats and messages, and meet the girl who is creating them. The messages are all clues about the girl’s isolated home in the woods.
The pace is deliberately slow, and, compared with many other children’s books, a little dry. Nevertheless, the writing is superb, integrating defined vocabulary words and detail which evokes the real life experiences of a rural summertime. The main characters are well-rounded, but show little growth or change. Readers will see themselves in Popeye and become inspired to find their own small adventures in their own backyards, perhaps discovering a friend who was there all along. Written for a 4th – 6th grade reader, this “slice of life” story is one which is probably best appreciated when read aloud by a parent or teacher. Reluctant readers may abandon this one, but those who persevere will enjoy a fine story.

Kristine Wildner

PAP, 9781932350241, $11.00
Fic 189 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
PAP, 9781932350296, $11.00
Fic 204 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
INT (PRI) Rating: 4
First Farm in the Valley and Winding Valley Farm are the first two of the five-book Latsch Valley Farm series by Anne Pellowksi. The stories present the joy, struggles, and faith of several generations of the author’s own Polish-American Catholic family—immigrants to rural Wisconsin.
The setting for First Farm in the Valley is 1876 and the events are seen through the eyes of six-year-old Anna, the author’s great aunt. There are constant challenges for Anna and her family, including a hailstorm and a diphtheria epidemic. Winding Valley Farm takes place in 1908 and is narrated by six-year-old Annie, the author’s mother. Farm life for Annie and her
siblings is often harsh, but also rich with cultural tradition, religious values, and a bit of mischief.

First Farm in the Valley and Winding Valley Farm abound with details about Polish heritage, farming, and the morals and priorities of a hardworking family. The adults and children face an endless amount of physical labor, all with an attitude of pride, responsibility, and thanksgiving. The families maintain Polish customs and continue to use Polish words and phrases, for which there is a helpful pronunciation guide at the end of each book. The books are recommended for ages 8-12 and “read-aloud” for ages 5 and up publisher. Delightful, small, black-and-white sketches by Roseanne Sharpe complement the stories.

Anne Pellowski offers an engaging look at her family’s experience through two snapshots in time. The stories are a compelling way for children to learn about our nation’s diverse cultural fabric.

_Nina Ditmar_

HBB, 9780802853769, $16.50
220.8/59 88 p. : col. ill. ; 22 cm.
PRI Rating: 4

It all starts in Genesis, in the beginning. From sea creatures, to Egypt plagued with frogs, to deer and lions, onward through sheep, scorpions, and the dragon of Revelation. In all, Animals of the Bible lists more than thirty-five animals, each with their own unique illustration and simple retelling of the Bible reference. A glossary, which also lists the Bible reference for each animal, adds value to this book.

Animals of the Bible is the third book in Marie-Hélène Delval’s Bible for Young Children series. An internationally known author of many children’s book, Delval’s rephrasing is true to scripture and easy for children to understand. Both poster artist and illustrator of adult and children’s books, Aurelia Fronty’s colorful, primitive style catches the eye and partners well with the dialogue. If you do not already have a book about the animals of the Bible for young children, this strongly bound, pretty volume is worth considering.

Donna Eggett


HBB, 9780310719120, $18.99
220.9/505 125 p. : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
PRI Rating: *5

Archbishop Desmond Tutu tells fifty-six of his favorite Bible stories in this beautifully designed book for children. Each story is written in the language of a child, followed by a short prayer. It is carefully bound to withstand use by children, and has a dust cover identical to the cover of the book.

Tutu begins in chronological order with the creation story. He tells stories of several of the Patriarchs in the Old Testament: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Continuing with Samuel and the Prophet Isaiah, he relates stories of Ruth and Esther, David, Joseph, and Jonah. As he turns to the New Testament, almost one-half of the book contains stories of Jesus and events from his life. Tutu is careful to include God’s plan of redemption for people of the world as he tells stories about the disciples and the evangelization of the world through the preaching of Peter, Paul, and John.

This book is a treasure that parents will use for many years as they read to their children about the God of the ages.

Juanita Wier Nobles

Jesus, God’s Great Gift is a very simple telling of the birth of Christ. Mary and Joseph travel by donkey to Bethlehem. Mary gives birth in a barn under a star, when they can find no other place to stay. The angels appear as bright lights and direct the nearby shepherds to the manger. Later, wise men follow the same star to bring gifts to Jesus, who grows up to do special things.

This “I Can Read” book (level 2: for developing readers) strays a bit from the traditional image of Jesus’ humble birth. It is at times oversimplified (“An important man told people to go to their hometowns”) and in other ways unnecessarily embellished (“A bald man answered” the door at the inn). The wise men arrive after Mary and Joseph have moved “to a real house” and bring what looks to be an entire roomful of gifts to a toddling Jesus.

A simply told story without embellishments and maintaining the easy-reader format would have more impact for little ones. A single reference to the Bible is opposite the title page, not within the story itself. The cartoonish illustrations by Dennis G. Jones show a rather cozy-looking barn full of nesting chickens and frolicking kittens. The pictures are bold and bright and may catch the attention of young readers, but do not reflect scripture”. The final page provides a gentle representation of Jesus, preaching with arms wide open to the crowd, and offering the essential message that He saved us from our sins.

Nina Ditmar


This is a lovely book reminding us of the love and strength in families. It is a picture book collection of poetry that opens with the words of Grandma:

Always come home,
Come home so I can see your faces.
Your brown, your cream,
your peach,
your purple, your midnight faces. Come.

Each of the 15 poems begin with the words “Must be some kind of love” and includes various aspects of a family reunion—cousin friends, coming home, sleeping room, etc. covering the joy of one African-American family’s annual reunion weekend. Love is the common denominator, captured in the words of a nine-year-old boy.

The inspirational poems are perfectly matched by the beautiful, warm illustrations of Eric Velasquez, drawing the reader into the celebration of family. It will be a treasured volume to be read and reread.

Ceil Carey


This is a lovely book reminding us of the love and strength in families. It is a picture book collection of poetry that opens with the words of Grandma:
Ahoy there, me hearties! Here be a piratical treasure! *Lives of the Pirates* is an entertaining look at historical, bygone, international pirates. They span the centuries 400 A.D. to 1844 A.D. Nineteen bloodthirsty, enterprising pirates are presented. They range from Alvilda, the Viking princess-turned-pirate, to the English navigator/raider, and favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Drake, to the infamous Captain Kidd, to the 19th century Chinese commander of two thousand ships, Madame Cheng. Historical trivia and tales of buried treasure add to the fun.

A rising star on several artistic fronts, Kathryn Hewitt puts color, flamboyance, and buccaneering action into her caricatures. *Lives of the Pirates* is another winner in Kathleen Krull’s *Lives of . . .* series. While not whitewashed, Krull’s pirates are everything children’s (and adult’s) pirate yearning hearts can desire. Reader attention is immediately captured with an interesting introduction and a piratical world map. The brief bios will whet the reader’s appetite for more. Anticipating this, Krull closes with a list for further reading. *Lives of the Pirates* is a fun book, a good look at an imagination catching part of history. Elementary school age through adult will enjoy it.

Donna Eggett

PAP, 9780310718376, $9.99
Fic 421 p.; 22 cm.
MS Rating: 4

Warrior is Bryan Davis’ second book in his fantasy series The Dragons of Starlight. The tale continues about another world where dragons have enslaved humans for years, and an ancient prophecy is about to unfold.

In Warrior, the black egg hatches, releasing the dragon prince as foretold in the prophecy. While Elyssa and Wallace try to convince the human captives that freedom is possible, Jason and Koren travel to the Northlands to find the one person who can help their quest of bringing the slaves home to their original world. They find that having a quest is not the same as completing it.

Because they depend on the humans, the dragons will do anything to prevent the human slaves from escaping, including pretending to be allies. Two dragons are working with the teens, but only one is a true ally—is Arxad or Magnar? Though some answers are discovered, all is not resolved at the conclusion of Warrior. There are some loose ends that will no doubt be resolved in the final book, Diviner.

Although not overtly Christian, the book is an allegory—it talks of the Creator and the Code. Many will recognize phrases from the Code as scriptural truths. Readers should also be aware all the main characters accept divination, conjuring, and ghosts as part of the story, although this is not the main focus.

This is an excellent choice for teens, especially those who like good vs. evil fantasy. A master storyteller, Davis has done a good job of developing a plot and characters that hold the interest of the reader.

Carol R. Gehringer


HBB, 9780399250903, $16.99
Fic 266 p.; 22 cm.
MS INT Rating: 4

A story of friendship, acceptance, and adventure, The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had takes place in 1917 in Moundsville, Alabama. Twelve-year-old Dit is anxiously awaiting the new postmaster and his family (including a boy his own age) who will be renting a house on his family farm. Much to his surprise, the boy turns out to be a girl, Emma; not only that—the family is black. Nevertheless, Dit's mother has a rule that they all must follow—be nice to everyone. Dit and Emma could not be more different. Nevertheless, as the two get to know each other through everyday adventures, they discover that despite their differences, their personalities are compatible and a strong friendship develops.

Although the world events make some impact on the plot, Kristin Levine focuses the story mostly on race relations in this small Southern town. For the most part, Emma and her family are accepted in the community along with a few other black families, most notably the local barber, Doc Hadley. There is one bully in town, Big Foot, the sheriff. The racial situation comes to a climax and Doc Hadley is accused of murder and sentenced to be hanged. In an exciting climax, Dit and Emma develop a complex plan to
save Doc from the gallows.

It will take a thoughtful reader to pick up *The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had*. The pace is deliberate, with each chapter introducing a small town adventure of sorts until the climax of the murder. Readers will become angry at the injustice inherent in some people's minds, yet hopeful when they understand that most are kind and accepting of differences. Levine's use of symbolism and the racial tensions offers a number of discussion points, making this story an excellent choice for a classroom read aloud.

Kristine Wildner


LIB, 9780547152509, $16.00

Fic 196 p.; 21 cm.

MS INT Rating: 4

Petronella’s sixteenth birthday party sets the stage for a kidnapping, a plot to take over England, and a search for the cure of an odd ailment in Dene Low's *Petronella Saves Nearly Everyone*.

During Petronella’s party, Uncle Augustus accidentally swallows a rare bug. As the guardian, Augustus is expected to introduce his niece to the young men and other elite guests, but finds him uncontrollably craving every insect in sight. The party tent collapses as he chases a delectable bug, sending guests dashing for safety. Two English dignitaries disappear in the mayhem. Petronella and her friends, Jane and the handsome James, join her in a madcap adventure to rescue the kidnapped guests—and possibly the cure for Augustus.

Dene Low crafts this Victorian novel to tickle the funny bone of the young at heart, while challenging the dictionary skills of any reader. Excessive high vocabulary from the first chapter to the last and an underdeveloped plot contribute to its slow pace.

This book is for readers who enjoy humor, bugs, and the love of words.

*Mary Vee*


HBB, 9780810989818, $15.95

Fic 301 p.; ill.; 22 cm.

MS Rating: 5

In 1841, an American whaling ship rescues five stranded Japanese fishermen. The Captain befriends fourteen-year-old Manjiro Nakahama and adopts him. They return to Bedford, Massachusetts, where Manjiro marvels at the Americans’ freedom to pursue their ambitions. Manjiro realizes that he will never be fully accepted in the United States (he is believed to be the first Japanese person to visit America), so he journeys home. Although initially imprisoned and often suspected as a spy, Manjiro helps Japan understand the outside world and open up foreign relations—ending a 250-year-long isolation policy.

*Heart of a Samurai* is an apt title because, from a young age, Manjiro longs to be a Samurai even though Japanese tradition dictates that he work as a lowly fisherman. Ironically, Manjiro is appointed samurai to the shogun because of his time in America—a truly shocking
thing at that time. The story is divided into five parts which open with a quote from the Samurai Creed or Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai. The influence of Western missionaries in Hawaii and Japan is negatively cast. “Western missionaries...were one reason Japan had closed its doors to foreigners.” (p.85) In Hawaii, “the native islanders here were expected to change almost everything about their lives for the missionaries. Manjiro could understand why Japan had expelled them.” (p.86) Once Manjiro returns to Japan, he is required to stomp on an image of the Madonna and child. (p.263)

The author, Margi Preus, masterfully imbues the story with realism so that the reader sees, feels, even smells, what Manjiro experiences. Even more impressive is the way she interweaves such intangibles as freedom, bigotry, homesickness, isolationism, etc. This is a 2011 Newberry Honor book.

Carol Satta


LCCN 2008048092.

HBB, 9780374361310, $16.99
Fic 234 p.; 22 cm.
MS Rating: 4

Amelia's mother tried to kill her before she was born. Amelia's father left with another woman, so all she has is her mother and her grandfather. Bonnie Shimko tells Amelia's story straight from the heart—a story of poverty and abuse, friendship and hope. The Private Thoughts of Amelia E. Rye reveals the feelings of an eleven-year-old girl, growing up in a dysfunctional environment during the 1960's. Amelia's adult siblings have never been a part of her life. Her brother is in jail, one sister in a mental institution, and the other estranged from her family. Amelia's mother struggles both financially and emotionally, dressing Amelia in her sisters' old clothing and glasses, and, sometimes, resorting to physical abuse.

Often bullied at school, Amelia's life takes a turn for the better when a black girl, Fancy, moves to town with her mother, who works for the local judge. Fancy's life is much different from Amelia's—she has a loving mother and plenty of money. Yet they share one thing in common—both are outsiders, and both have secrets. When a woman moves in near Fancy, Amelia begins to learn some truth about her parent's past, and gains confidence for her future.

Rather depressing in the beginning, Amelia's voice rings true as a child, wise beyond her years. As her friendship with Fancy grows and other positive influences enter her life, the book swells with hope and intrigue as secrets are revealed and characters develop, showing reasons behind the hurt and signs of a brighter future. Readers who identify with Amelia's dysfunctional family will find this book inspiring; others may find it disturbing at the beginning, but will find themselves cheering for Amelia. Amelia's voice is genuine, her circumstances all too real; a thoughtful book for middle school readers.

Kristine Wildner

PAP, 9780689864353, $6.99

PAP, 9780689829574, $6.99


PAP, 9780689844447, $0

MS (HS, Adult) Rating: 5

Jackaroo. On an errand from the king to map his kingdom, a Lord stops at Ram’s Head Inn and requests that the innkeeper’s daughter Gwyn, and the servant Burl accompany him and his 10-year-old son on their travels. Overtaken by a blizzard on their return, Gwyn takes refuge with the Lordling in a familiar hut. During the several days they are snowed in, Gwyn discovers behind a cabinet the traditional garb of the legendary masked hero, Jackaroo. Old stories about Jackaroo abound, some about a compassionate and unselfish man, and some otherwise. Now Gwyn realizes that some may have a kernel of truth. In the months to come, Gwyn faces danger in her own efforts to help others. And she learns that there may be more Jackaroos than she believes.

On Fortune’s Wheel. Birle’s effort to retrieve her father’s boat from a young Lord heading south brings them together. Facing perils and trials from robbers, pirates, and slavery, Birle and Orien have several opportunities to save each other’s lives. [Followed by The Wings of a Falcon (OP)]

Elske. Rescued from death by the self-sacrifice of her grandmother, Elske escapes from Wolfer territory to the distant city of Tristad. There she becomes a servant to the Princess Beriel whose brother has conspired against her to keep her from her rightful throne in the Kingdom.

Noted author Cynthia Voigt has created in her four novels of the Kingdom an imaginary world that resembles medieval Europe. Her strong, well-developed characters grow through their trying, and sometimes brutal, external challenges along with various internal dilemmas. Two generations separate each succeeding volume in the series from the preceding one, but the minor mentions of earlier characters do not hinder the exciting, tightly constructed plots with that have some surprising twists.

The culture of the period portrayed is secular and frank (for example, mention of the earlier repeated rape of Beriel to disqualify her claim to the throne). Themes are compassion, loyalty, integrity, and justice. For readers not disturbed by a few references without detail to unwed sex in the last two volumes, titles in this very well written series, singly or together, are definitely recommended for public and some Christian school or home libraries.

Donna W. Bowling


PAP, 9781591668534, $8.99

Fic 98 p.: ill.; 22 cm.

MS INT Rating: 5

In Forbidden Gates, Nathan, son of a temple official, decides to help a young Gentile penetrate beyond the court of the Gentiles so he can meet God. Dorian is caught, but Nathan manages to elude capture. His uncle, a temple priest, knows the truth, but
instead of helping him, forces him to break more Jewish laws and deliver a bribe to a Roman centurion. On his thirteenth birthday Nathan reveals his disobedience to his father and runs from the ceremony marking his passage to manhood. Followers of Jesus give Nathan shelter and work. After witnessing the apostles’ compassion and their courage in the face of being whipped, he accepts Jesus as Messiah and returns home to share his belief with his estranged father.

Denise Williamson captures the inner turmoil of a boy’s coming-to-age against the backdrop of the tense first century AD. The plot stretches full circle from Nathan aiding Dorian to Dorian saving Nathan. Nathan’s emotions and struggles are authentic. Stephen and the priests persecuting Christians in the book of Acts are brought to life. The reader can experience the temple through the excellent descriptions and feel the conflict between its customs and the followers of Christ. Young people can learn from Nathan’s example to weigh new ideas and watch to determine if those speaking “truth” are willing to live and die for it.

Rebecca Velez


PAP, 9781591668541, $8.99
Fic 114 p.; ill.; 22 cm.
MS INT Rating: 4

In River of Danger, a white man named Samuel Kirkland arrives in Young-Wolf’s Seneca village. Young Wolf despises white men, as do other villagers led by Captain, but Young-Wolf’s family adopts Samuel, who becomes known as White-Skin. White-Skin claims to want to learn their language so he can share the words of the Great Good Voice. Young-Wolf agrees to spy on the stranger for Captain, whose band of warriors he longs to join, but when White-Skin’s life is in danger, Young-Wolf listens to his father and hides in the family’s sugar hut with him. When they emerge from hiding, famine has begun. Unaccustomed to hunger, Samuel grows so weak that Young-Wolf’s father decides to build a canoe and take him back to the Indian agent. At their destination, Young-Wolf’s mother dies of consumption, but not before White-Skin is able to share words of hope and peace. Young-Wolf’s family chooses to believe, but the surviving members travel home with food supplies before Young-Wolf decides whether to support White-Skin or Captain.

Denise Williamson aptly describes life from the perspective of a twelve-year-old Indian boy with phrases like “kettle of anger” and “landed like an overturned box turtle.” The conflict is believable, both Young-Wolf’s inner conflict and the outer conflicts of famine and a difficult journey. Salvation is also presented realistically. Young-Wolf does not easily accept a white man’s words, and his mother’s conversion does not save her physical life, but she dies with peace. Ms. Williamson does another stellar job with a coming-of-age, Christian fiction novel.

Rebecca Velez

PAP, 9780736917681, $9.99
248.8/2 103 p.; 21 cm.
MS (INT) Rating: 3

Veteran author Elizabeth George brings out major themes for preteen girls about how to successfully walk with God in A Girl After God’s Own Heart. George uses a fictional preteen girl to introduce each short chapter and draws readers into the content. She covers what it means to love Jesus with your whole heart, care for your personal space, interact properly with friends and family, and participate in church and school. Each chapter offers fill-in sections with questions and verses to consider and concludes with a Heart 2 Heart conversation between George and the reader, reinforcing the concept.

Preteen girls need growing relationships with God, which this book endeavors to cultivate. The main ideas George addresses are sound and biblical. However, the questions for the response sections seem simplistic and too young for this age group. George’s Heart 2 Heart personal notes to the reader summarize each chapter well and provide encouragement for preteens to pursue Christ first. A Girl After God’s Own Heart is a beginner primer on walking with Jesus for girls who like the read-and-respond style of book.

Karen Schmidt


HBB, 9780670011896, $19.99
323/.1196 72 p.; ill.; 25 cm.
MS HS Rating: 5

Marching for Freedom is photojournalism at its best! Partridge tells the story of how ordinary children and teens changed history and helped attain the vote for black Americans during the spring of 1965 in Selma, Alabama.

In Marching for Freedom, readers are introduced to several young participants in the demonstrations; their stories are followed through the book. The author incorporates the danger and spirit of these events. Through the inspiring text and photos, Partridge describes the selflessness and bravery of the young people who marched for freedom and their parents who allowed it. Martin Luther King, Jr. also plays a huge role in the events of Marching for Freedom. His presence and words were a great impetus in the courage for the young marchers in what was called the Selma campaign.

The photos speak for themselves: young convicts in the fields in striped prison uniforms, police with billy clubs, wearing gas masks as they assault protestors with waves of tear gas, and the young people, marching, marching, in the rain, in the sun, smiling and singing. The book reads almost like fiction, riveting and compelling. It is well organized and contains archival photographs, poems, songs, author’s notes, source notes, and an extensive bibliography. This will be an excellent addition to any library.

Ceil Carey


LIB, 9780761442325, $25.95
In *Immigration: This Land Is Whose Land?* Lila Perl examines legal and illegal immigration in the United States from both an historical and a political perspective. The book focuses first on the current Hispanic population, and then flashes back to Chinese, Irish, Japanese, and Italian emigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries before delving into more recent policies regarding guest workers, interns, refugees, displaced persons, and asylum seekers. It includes a timeline of major immigration laws from 1819 to 2006, extensive chapter notes, a bibliography, an index, and a list of books and websites for further information.

Interspersed throughout the text are a dozen side articles on one, two, or three gold-colored pages which, though interesting and informative, appear abruptly, sometimes right in the middle of a paragraph or sentence. There are 17 photographs from various sources that are more appropriately placed throughout. Generally, the book pleads for a more humane approach to assimilating diverse populations and promotes global citizenship over American nationalism. Perl exposes the racism that has fueled America’s policy of exclusion and questions the criminalization of undocumented aliens, many of whom make important contributions to our national economy. Typed above the title on the cover and title page is the word “CONTROVERSY!” which accurately reflects the unsettling, but factual, information within.

The design of the book targets middle school readers, but high school students might also use it as a reference. The extensive citations make this a particularly useful resource for students interested in understanding the pro-immigration side of the current debate on this subject.

*Laurie A. Gray*


MS Rating: 4

*The Amazon Rain Forest* (part of the *Nature’s Wonders* series) is a richly-illustrated informational text that covers the geography, natural resources, history, people, and environmental threats relating to this tropical region.

The writing is clear, and is enhanced by stunning photographs on nearly every other page. Information boxes on topics such as “Medicinal Plants” spice up the format. The chapter titles are ambiguous, and each chapter contains a rather unpredictable mix of topics. However, researchers can use the extensive index to pinpoint specific subjects or facts.

Approximately half of the book addresses environmental issues—extinction, deforestation, global warming, poaching, exploitation, wildlife trafficking, and destroyed lives. The author sometimes uses fears (“Scientists fear ” p.76) and estimates (“Some scientists estimate” p.81; “Brazilian scientists estimate” p.84) to make an argument. Whites and large companies are spoken of negatively, and the indigenous people are portrayed as wise.

Ann Heinrichs is a world traveler and prolific nonfiction writer for children and young
adults. Heinrichs mentions that Charles Darwin explored the Amazon rain forest in 1832 and that he “was amazed to see how plants and animals adapted to their environment and formed new species in the process. These studies led to his theory of evolution” (p.52). The author also states that the Amazon rain forest was covered by a freshwater sea millions of years ago (p.13).

Includes glossary, “Fast Facts,” bibliography of books and websites, and an extensive index.

* Carol Satta


HBB, 9780786818679, $16.99 811.52 1 v. (unpaged) : col. ill. ; 26 x 29 cm.

MS All ages Rating: *5

Drawing on the reserves of depth and meaning that rivers of the world have poured into his people, Langston Hughes created this classic poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, in 1920. It continually stands as a monument to the courage and strength of African Americans. Huts beside the Congo, pyramids beside the Nile, mutually singing with the Mississippi—Hughes and his people can claim, “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.”

With multiple award winning artist E. B. Lewis’ ardent illustrations spread gloriously across two pages and the noted American poet Langston Hughes’ poem riding easily along with them, The Negro Speaks of Rivers, becomes a tone poem, the music rising from the depths as you read. Sunlight gold, storm dark, children sparkling with water, E. B. Lewis has poured himself as well as his watercolors into his pictures. Langston Hughes speaks from a former era, with words that resonate with this era. A celebration of African American roots, The Negro Speaks of Rivers will lead all readers of all ages and ethnicities into considering the joy to be found in their own past, present, and future. This book will enhance all libraries, art, history, and English classes, school room reading corners, and your home.

Donna Eggett

Herodotus and the road to history / by Jeanne Bendick ; pictures by the author. (Living history library) Bathgate, ND: Bethlehem Books, 2009. LCCN 2009931271.

PAP, 9781932350203, $13.95 B or 938/.0072024 xii, 79 p. : ill., maps ; 22 cm.

MS (INT) Rating: 4

Reading about history is difficult for many students. Often they face one of two problems. Either they get bored reading about a chain of facts and figures, or they fail to understand the cultural context of the events described. In either case, the student becomes disinterested. Jeanne Bendick attempts to solve this problem in her book Herodotus and the Road to History. This is a biography written in the voice of Herodotus, the father of history. The book traces Herodotus’ life from his birth in Haliandcarnassus around the sixth century BCE through his exploration of the Syrian, Persian, Egyptian, and Greek cultures. The text is filled with mythology, Herodotus’ retelling of historical events, and Herodotus’ first hand experiences of the world.

Bendick’s book has a lot to offer young readers. It retells
Herodotus’ story in such a way that the reader feels like he or she is on the journey, as if they are discovering each new idea or city with Herodotus. Bendick takes the time to explain the significance of culture, history, dress, and religion. This provides students with more than an interesting read; it gives them a glimpse into the thought process of the ancient world. Bendick has filled the text with illustrations and maps. Each picture captures the artistic essence of the different cultures Herodotus encountered while still holding onto the playful feel of a child’s art work. While Bendick’s work serves as an entrance into the study of the ancient Near East, it tends to over simplify Herodotus’ journeys. At several places it leaves the reader confused or wanting more detail. Overall, the book is a must read for any student interested in the ancient world.

Monty Self

PAP, 9781600069482, $14.99
Fic 197 p.; 21 cm.
HS Rating: 3

In Melody Carlson’s contemporary fiction, Forgotten : Seventeen and Homeless, high school senior Adele is a loner with a strong work ethic who has been forced to grow up quickly because of her mother’s erratic employment history, mental health disorders, and illegal substance abuse problems. Adele and her mother, Cybil, have essentially switched parent/child roles.

The story begins as their family of two relocates at the prospect of a new well paying job for Cybil. Adele quickly befriends a circle of wealthy classmates from whom she is determined to hide her past. For a time, Adele’s life seems to run smoothly as she enjoys school, new friends, and begins dating her first boyfriend. However, her life soon begins an all too familiar downward spiral. Adele constructs a series of lies to hide the truth from her friends, but the challenges escalate when she cannot meet the rent payment after her mother disappears.

Cybil fell into patterns of depression, unemployment, and illegal drug use throughout Adele’s life. Her current backslide occurs in the context of the story. Adele is a likeable character who tries to make the best out of her difficult situations. Her desire to have a normal life despite the obstacles is something many teens can identify with. This novel shows how homelessness affects people from varied backgrounds and exemplifies how situations beyond one’s control can force a person into homelessness. However, it is disappointing that the secondary characters are not well developed and the ending feels rushed, which leaves the reader with unresolved questions. Also, the faith aspect feels abrupt as it is not integrated into the plot but instead occurs swiftly in summary.

Elissa Rizzo


HBB, 9780310720782, $15.99
Fic 223 p.; 22 cm.
HS Rating: 4

Mary Rudine, whose nickname of MR has been shortened to Mister, is fourteen and a good, church-going girl who loves to sing in the choir. That is, until she meets Trey, a gorgeous schoolmate with whom she falls madly in love. Ignoring her friends’ warnings, she gets way too involved with the smooth-talking Trey, ending up pregnant.

Written in first person free verse, A Girl Named Mister is beautifully written: short, sweet, and direct, never dwelling on excess detail but clearly making its point. Mister’s character is wonderfully developed, as is her magnificent relationship with her mother. All aspects of Mister’s feelings are covered, from her remorse and guilt over her pregnancy, to her briefly considering abortion, to her struggle with whether to let her baby be adopted. However, the story merely recounts Mister’s experiences, with no sense of judgment or lessons learned.

Nikki Grimes’ writing, although lovely, is blunt; the description of the sexual act
between Mister and Frey is somewhat graphic. The scene of Mister losing her virginity is depicted as a frantic plea to God to understand that her feelings are so strong; she can’t stop herself and doesn’t want to. Later, Mister declares the sex act is “mostly pain.” There’s one use of “OMG.”

A nice touch is the parallel between Mister and Mary, the mother of God, whose story Mister reads in a book of poems she finds. This story is also told in first person verse that not only brings Mary to life, it’s so lyrical it’s breathtaking. However, Mary’s encounter with Gabriel is physical and somewhat graphic, as well.

Rosemarie DiCristo


PAP, 9781578568239, $13.99

Fic 339 p. : map ; 21 cm.


PAP, 97814000071296, $13.99

Fic ix, 355 p. : map ; 21 cm.


PAP, 97814000072507, $13.99

Fic xiv, 399 p. : map ; 21 cm.


PAP, 97814000072514, $13.99

Fic xiii, 351 p. : maps ; 21 cm.


PAP, 97814000073788, $13.99

Fic xvi, 381 p. : map ; 21 cm.

HS (MS, Adult) Rating: 4

In *DragonSpell*, a slave girl Kale Allerion happens to find a dragon egg, and the village elders instruct her to take it to the capital city. Waylaid on her journey, she finds herself drawn to seven more dragon eggs in a cavern. Because of her rare gift as a dragon keeper, Paladin’s agents from Vendela intercept Kale and direct her to join them in an urgent quest to save a special dragon egg from the evil wizard Risto. Granny Noon gives Kale some kindly advice and helpful provisions, including a special moonbeam cape with pockets for her eight dragon eggs. On their way to enlist the bog wizard Fenworth and his librarian to join their quest, Kale helps to rescue a large riding dragon and hatches two of her eggs containing minor dragons with useful gifts. Through the challenges she faces, Kale learns to trust Wulder and to choose service to Paladin.

In *DragonQuest*: When Kale and the aloof Lehman Bardon are sent to guide the newly hatched dragon Regidor they find themselves looking to rescue another young dragon from Risto.

In *DragonKnight*: A grandmother and her granddaughter interrupt Squire Bardon’s planned sabbatical, requesting him to lead in an urgent quest to find and deliver some of Paladin’s knights from a spell cast by Risto. Kale, and her wizard friends come to their aid.

In *DragonFire*: Paladin assigns the wizard Kale and her dragon keeper father to
gather dragons and hatch dragon eggs to join in the coming battle against evil wizards. Kale’s husband, Sir Bardon, and her mother are assigned as warriors in another area of the conflict.

In *DragonLight*: Sir Bardon and Lady Kale join Regidor and Gilda in their search for a legendary hidden colony of dragons. During their quest, they must also confront the new heretical sect of “Followers” and ultimately face the powerful monster dragon Mot Angra.

In her *DragonKeeper Chronicles*, retired schoolteacher Donita K. Paul has created a Christian fantasy series with plenty of excitement and touches of humor. Her well-developed characters of seven different high races have a variety of unique personalities and develop special relationships with the dragons that serve with them. Good wizards with various talents apply their understanding of Wulder’s creation in their wizardry. The various plots include both external and internal struggles and some surprise endings. Christian themes include the necessity of personal commitment to serve Wulder’s representative, Paladin; knowing and obeying the Principles in Wulder’s Tomes; following through with the task immediately ahead while trusting Wulder for the future; and truth and integrity in words and actions. Awards include: *DragonSpell*, 2005 Christy Honor Book (Visionary); *DragonKnight*, 2007 ACFW Book of the Year; and *DragonLight*, 2009 Clive Staples Award. Highly recommended for public, church, and Christian school libraries and homes that enjoy fantasy.

*Donna W. Bowling*
**College 101: Campus Life for Christians** / St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2010. LCCN 2009043389.

PAP, 9780758619068, $9.99 248.8/34 202 p.: ill.; 19 cm.

HS (Adult) Rating: 4

*College 101: Campus Life for Christians* is a manual for Christian teens preparing for college. The 200-page book is divided into twelve chapters, each one highlighting a particular aspect of college life. Topics include move-in day, dorm life, dating, finances, time management, and more. Counsel is given to students attending both Christian and secular universities. The authors are students at various colleges and universities around the United States.

Each chapter is written from a Christian perspective and gives practical guidance for viewing college’s opportunities and challenges through a Christ-centered lens. Scriptures are used throughout the book to provide authority on issues students face. Parents may note that when writing about off-campus social activities, the authors regard alcohol use as something to be avoided by minors, and approached in moderation by those of legal drinking age.

Student authorship allows for insight into today’s unique collegiate challenges, and will appeal to teenagers through the use of multiple real-life examples. The students also provide many common sense suggestions; for example, when and how a student should communicate with the new roommate. Parents will find themselves remembering first-year college trials that they had long forgotten, and will be glad for reminders to assist their children in preparing to leave home. The pages of the book are uncluttered and the font is easy to read. The illustrations by Jon Cannell are pleasantly simple, and are limited primarily to chapter heading pages. Using *College 101* as a planning tool, the college-bound student will be more equipped to live confidently for Christ on campus.

*Amy Arens*


LIB, 9781580136075, $20.95 919.8/9 104 p.: col. ill., col. maps; 23 x 29 cm.

HS (MS) Rating: 4

The continent of Antarctica has always captivated the human imagination; explorers and scientists have put their lives in danger learning about this vast continent that holds so many secrets of the natural world. Marvelously designed and organized, *Frozen Secrets* begins with a brilliant photograph of the world featuring Antarctica at the center. Sally W. Walker captures the reader’s attention by beginning with the mysterious and majestic qualities of the continent, then moving into early human exploration and current scientific expeditions.

The informational narrative presents the challenges of this unique environment and explains how the use of technology has enabled scientists to make important discoveries about the world’s history of warming and cooling, the land and fossils beneath the ice, and the patterns of ice formation, movement and melting. Concluding with a thoughtful explanation of how the scientific studies of the Antarctic support the theory
of global warming, the impact of this barren desert on the rest of the world is awe-inspiring. A glossary, source notes, selected bibliography, resources for further reading, websites and an index complete the book.

Although sized similarly to a picture book and designed to incorporate numerous large photographs, *Frozen Secrets* is not written for a casual student, but rather one who is willing to concentrate; think about how all the information works together, and keep an open mind about how our world is changing. Written at an 8th grade reading level, the paragraphs are relatively complex, although the chapters are logically divided into smaller subsections allowing for efficient skimming. Diagrams, close-up photography, and maps further extend the text while providing another level of understanding. This comprehensive book is a solid research resource; important because of its up-to-date information, stunning images, and detailed account.

*Kristine Wildner*


LIB 9780761444848, $29.95
937/.07  320 p. : col. ill. ; 26 cm.
HS (MS)  Rating: 4

*Everyday Life in the Roman Empire* is a nice choice for students learning about the Roman Empire. The lively, interesting text is simply written but greatly detailed, providing information about the Roman government and army, the emperors, the people and how they lived, and the roles of men and women. It’s a large, glossy book liberally illustrated with full and half page photos of Roman art and architecture. There’s a list of sources for further reading, a select bibliography, a glossary, nine pages of endnotes, a six-page index, and a list of picture credits. The book covers the period from 27 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.

Some aspects may be unsuitable for younger readers. While innocent, a poem by Ovid explains how some fairly graphic sexual details. There’s also a photo of a nearly naked statue of Mercury. The text delicately acknowledges soldiers’ “relationships” with women living near army bases, as well as slaves’ “lasting relationships” with loved ones (since they couldn’t legally marry).

Other potential problems: the book’s great detail can be repetitive, as in its emphasis on women’s lack of power (an accusation not entirely borne out by the many profiles of powerful Roman women). Descriptions of Roman persecution of Christians are heavy-handed, almost patronizing, and can be read as blaming the “extremely intolerant” Christians for the abuse. Christian emperors’ persecutions of ancient Roman religions are also mentioned. The book ends with author Kathy Hinds quoting a Roman’s “eloquent defense” of religious tolerance, wholeheartedly supporting his belief that all religions are equally valid ways of finding the truth.

*Rosemarie DiCristo*

PAP, 9780802458810, $13.99
Fic 319 p.; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Tessa Afshar, author of Pearl in the Sand, is quick to remind readers that her retelling of the story of Rahab is fictional. However, Afshar does such an excellent job of creating a compelling and reasonable tale that one could almost imagine that this is truly what Rahab’s life would have looked like.

The story of Rahab is familiar to many: she is the prostitute who sheltered two Israelite spies in Jericho. Her life was spared because of the red signal cord she hung in her window when the city was attacked. Rahab settled in Israel, and the Bible later mentions her in the genealogy of Jesus as being the wife of Salmon; their son was Boaz, who married Ruth.

Ashar’s story describes Rahab—a former pagan—as she adapts to a foreign culture, grows in her understanding of God, and learns the many Jewish laws. Ashar also raises the interesting question of how a former prostitute could end up marrying an Israelite. The novel describes the hand of God working not only in Rahab’s life to heal the deep emotional wounds she carries from her past, but also in the life of the proud, judgmental man who will become her husband.

Anyone who has felt unworthy in the eyes of God will benefit from the beautiful message of grace, forgiveness, and restoration woven throughout this story.

Sherri Beeler


PAP, 9780802447319, $13.99
Fic 334 p.; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 3

Things have been tense in Denise and Craig’s marriage, but when Craig skips church to go hiking, Denise is shocked to receive a phone call saying that he has been in a car accident and is in a coma. Worse yet, when Craig finally regains consciousness, he does not remember anything about Denise, his children, or his past life. In some ways this turns into a blessing, because it’s like starting over in their relationship.

Eventually, however, details emerge that suggest Craig was having an affair. Denise wrestles with her hurt and outrage, yet is unsure what to do since the “new” Craig seems so tender and kind to her and the boys. She welcomes him home from the hospital and their relationship seems to be making slow but positive progress—until additional memories surface that threaten the fragile healing of their marriage.

Written in first person, Christina Berry’s novel The Familiar Stranger will appeal emotionally to readers. The redemptive message, while clear, is not preachy, and the frankness with which Denise faces her confusing circumstances is something that readers can relate to. Also, by using alternating perspectives from “him” and “her,” Berry offers both sides of the story, and builds the novel’s suspense with tantalizing hints, rabbit trails, and surprising twists. While some readers may guess at the outcome, there is enough uncertainty to make the ending satisfying.

Sherri Beeler

HBB, 9780764205583, $19.99

Fic 426 p. : map ; 22 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Janette Oke and T. Davis Bunn continue their collaboration in this biblical fiction series, featuring the stories of minor characters from the time of the early Christians. The Damascus Way focuses on Abigail's brother, Jacob, as well as Julia, a young woman of Jewish and Greek heritage, during the persecution of the early Christians. The Damascus Way picks up after the death of the first Christian martyr and Abigail's husband, Stephen. Five years have now past. Abigail's brother Jacob has returned, bringing an ailing Alban with him. Jacob takes on the responsibility of being a secret courier between the communities of believers while maintaining his profession as Jamal's caravan guard. He convinces Abigail to take her daughter and leave Jerusalem with Martha.

Meanwhile, Jamal's privileged daughter, Julia, discovers the secret her Greek father has been hiding. As she struggles with the uncertainty of her future in light of this secret, she and her Hebrew mother decide to travel to Damascus under Jacob’s protection. Like Jacob, Julia accepts the role of courier to the believers, despite the danger involved, and risking the displeasure of her father. Saul of Taurus is on his way to persecute the believers in Damascus, and he joins their caravan with his Temple guard, making everyone a bit edgy.

This book is more character-driven than plot-driven, and the narrative is occasionally slow. However, the stories of the early days of the Christians, Peter, Philip's travels to Samaria, and Saul's conversion, are very interesting and should appeal to readers of biblical fiction.

Recommended for high school libraries and inspirational collections in public libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer


PAP, 9780310289838, $12.99

Fic 323 p. ; 22 cm.

A promise of hope / Amy clipston. (Kauffman Amish bakery series ; 2) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011. LCCN 2009051036

PAP, 9780310289845, $12.99

Fic 300 p. ; 22 cm.


PAP, 9780310319955, $12.99

Fic 329 p. ; 22 cm.

Adult HS Rating: 5

Amy Clipston, a first-time author, has written a series of novels about an Amish family who live in Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania. The women run a bakery for tourists and the men operate a wood-working shop.

In A Gift of Grace, Daniel Kaufmann and his wife Rebecca, are an infertile couple longing for a child. When Rebecca’s sister and her husband die in a car crash, their two nieces come to live with them. The younger girl, Lindsay, is happy to adapt to Amish life, but the older girl, Jessica, wants no part of it. In spite the efforts of Daniel and Rebecca, Jessica goes back to her hometown to live with a friend and finish high school.
Then Rebecca, after experiencing infertility for fifteen years, discovers she is pregnant, and is filled with hope as she awaits the birth of her baby.

Book two, *A Promise of Hope*, focuses on Sarah, Daniel's sister. Her husband, Peter Troyer, is killed in an explosion in a furniture shop fire. After his death, Sarah learns that she is pregnant with twins. Her sorrow and grief are eased a little when Luke Troyer arrives at Bird-in-Hand to try to learn something about Peter. As they become closer, Sarah turns away from Luke when she discovers he has been lying about his relationship to Peter. From Luke, Sarah learns that Peter had a secret life, one that will affect hers as well.

In *A Place of Peace*, we meet Miriam Lapp, who was engaged to marry Timothy Kaufmann, the youngest of the siblings. However, Miriam chose to leave her Amish roots and work in the English world. When Hannah, Miriam's sister, calls with the news that their mother died unexpectedly, Miriam returns to Bird-in-Hand, determined to set things right and make peace with her family. Miriam's father continues to rebuff her, as does her sister and brother. Timothy's family also has issues with welcoming Miriam back to the Amish way of life. Her sister Hannah is the only sibling who wants her to come back home, so Miriam unhappily returns to Indiana.

Throughout the series the author shows that all families have problems such as infertility, jealousy, deceit, and grief. This closely knit Amish family shows by their eventual understanding and forgiveness that problems can be worked out through careful attention.

Ms. Clipston's characterization is consistent throughout all the books. As characters are added, the plot continues without interruption. She adds mystery and intrigue as new characters came along from the past, opening new areas of interest.

*Juanita Wier Nobles*

*Another dawn / Kathryn Cushman. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011. LCCN 2010037082.*

PAP, 9780764208256, $14.99
Fic 318 p.; 22 cm.
Adult Rating: 5

Grace is a single mother with a four-year-old son, Dylan, who was born out of wedlock. She moved from her home in Tennessee to California after her mother's death, in an effort to separate herself from her father. Grace feels that her father's smoking contributed to her mother's cancer and she is unable to forgive him.

Jana, Grace's sister, still lives in their hometown, caring for their dad. When he is faced with a serious surgery, Jana insists that Grace return and help with his care. When Grace arrives, her son becomes seriously ill and inadvertently infects several other children in their circle of friends. Jana's baby is also infected.

As Grace faces the problems caused by her refusal to have her son vaccinated as a baby and sees the suffering it causes for other families, she comes to rely on God again, as she did in her earlier years while living at home. She is able to redevelop a good relationship with her father. Dylan and his grandfather establish a good connection. With the help of an older neighbor, a friend of her mother's, Grace is able to recognize the importance of
faith, family, and forgiveness, not only for her father, but for herself.

*Another Dawn* by Kathryn Cushman is another page-turner, consistent with her delightful writing style. In this offering, she deals with modern-day issues such as infectious diseases. Autism, and home schooling, as well as family issues and rivalries experienced by many. Cushman’s writing flows easily as more themes develop. As in every one of her novels, the issues are pertinent and well-developed. Her believable characters are consistent throughout.

*Juanita Wier Nobles*

**The preacher's bride / J o d y H e d l u n d .** Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010. LCCN 2010016350.

PAP, 9780764208324, $14.99

Fic 379 p.; 22 cm.

Adult Rating: 5

In this engaging historical fiction, debut author Jody Hedlund takes readers for an intriguing journey alongside the strong-willed, self-sacrificing puritan, Elizabeth Whitbread. When traveling preacher John Costin suddenly finds himself a widower with four small children to raise, Elizabeth quickly accepts the role of housekeeper for him. John can’t help but see that she is a natural in caring for his children. Elizabeth enjoys her mission of mercy until an unknown enemy of the widower threatens to do her harm unless she spies on John’s preaching activities. When the man carries out his threats, Elizabeth doesn’t know what to do—spy on the preacher who is bringing the Gospel to many people, or watch her reputation be destroyed as she dodges several attempts at her life.

Jody Hedlund has a gift with words and an imagination that effortlessly brings stories to life. Set in Bedford, England, in the year 1659, she takes you on a wonderful adventure of the hardships that the Puritans faced in preaching the Gospel. The plot is well thought out and developed. Based on the life of Elizabeth Bunyan, the story contains many surprises and vividly shows the hardships that she must have faced.

There is some violence in the book, though it isn’t described in graphic detail. A female character is assaulted on more than one occasion—one by a man’s fist and another time with his riding whip. Another character is beaten to death and the woman’s mutilated appearance is described to some extent.

The main characters are devout Puritans and the plot is centered around the time that the persecution from the Royalists began against the Puritans. Elizabeth rises to the challenge, and while she has her faults and human desires, her character is strong and sets a wonderful example of the Proverbs 31 woman.

*Katy McCurdy*


PAP, 9781433668562, $14.99

Fic xi, 330 p.; 22 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 5

In *Petra City in Stone*, three newcomers arrive in Petra, the capital city of the Nabateans. Cassie brings her son Alexander, hoping to find her deceased husband’s family. Julian is there trying to spare his Roman family from his outspokenness of Trajan’s persecution of Christians. He is also running from God’s...
plan for his life—but God has chosen him to replace Malik, the aging elder of the church in Petra. After discovering her son is the heir of the Nabatean throne, Cassie is thrown into the streets by the wicked queen Hagiru, who takes Alex and plans to sacrifice him to the demon-god Dushara. Julian finds Cassie and takes her to the followers of Jesus, who agree to help rescue the five-year-old from the palace. In the end, Roman soldiers and the power of Jesus converge at the gods’ altar for a final showdown with Hagiru and the dark powers behind her.

Set in early second century AD, this historical Christian novel provides great tie-ins to Scripture and early church history. Malik was a real disciple of Paul, and martyred by Trajan Christians in the arena. The characters are complex and believable. Abandoned by her parents as a child, Cassia has been seeking love all her life, and she meets it in the person of Jesus. Meanwhile, Julian battles guilt and fights God’s will for his life. The good-versus-evil conflict in this book is especially powerful—Cassia against Hagiru reflects the bigger struggle in the spiritual realm between Jesus and the demons behind the false gods of Petra. Readers will come away with renewed appreciation for the courage of Christians in the face of uncertainty and persecution.


PAP, 9780310278719, $14.99
Fic 398 p.; 22 cm.


PAP, 9780310278726, $14.99
Fic 364 p.; 22 cm.


PAP, 9780310278733, $14.99
Fic 370 p.; 22 cm.

Adult Rating: 4

Noel Hynd’s contemporary thrillers, The Russian Trilogy, features Alexandra DeLuca, a Treasury agent whose skills are tapped for several special missions. She finds herself in Kiev, Madrid, and Cairo, as she tries to unravel the clues in this international suspense series.

In *Conspiracy in Kiev*, Alexandra skilled with her job of investigating financial scams and Internet schemes for the US Treasury. She is sent on a special mission to Kiev tracking an international gangster. Her faith is tested when Robert is killed, protecting the President during his visit to Kiev.

In *Midnight in Madrid*, Alexandra is on the trail of an art thief. When a Chinese national is found dead, Alex is joined by a mysterious new partner, also on the trail of the missing artwork. They face dangerous situations as Alex and Peter attempt to unravel the web of intrigue and avoid those who would kill them before they succeed.

In *Countdown in Cairo*, Alexandra is faced with her biggest challenge yet. A CIA agent and former mentor who was thought to be dead, was sighted in Cairo. Alex becomes involved in a deadly game of double cross as events that were started in Kiev, and continued in Madrid, are concluded in Cairo. When faced with the truth about Robert’s death, she faces
another challenge to her faith. The series is full of plot twists, fast-paced action, and non-stop suspense that is reminiscent of authors Tom Clancy and Robert Ludlum. The spiritual overtone is light, not preachy. Alexandra’s faith is tested from the moment she arrives in Kiev to the conclusion in Cairo. When questioned by Yuri, the Russian gangster, she speaks plainly about her beliefs and her doubts.

Readers who dislike violence and bad language that is typical to espionage thrillers should pass on this series. People die in these books (often violently and almost in every chapter); people drink, smoke, and swear. However, it is relevant and appropriate to the story of spies, terrorists, art thieves, cold-blooded killers, and special agents.

There is excellent character development and tightly written plots. It is espionage fiction with bits of history sprinkled throughout.

Recommended for public libraries and adult collections in church libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer


HBB, 9780310266990, $21.99
Fic 328 p.; 23 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 5

Bestselling author Karen Kingsbury presents Leaving, the first in the Bailey Flanigan series, a contemporary novel. Many readers have watched Bailey grow up in other books by Ms. Kingsbury; it is a delight to read about Bailey as she faces leaving home.

In Leaving, Bailey is offered a Broadway audition, following a part in a recent film. She is pursued by her co-worker, and Matt. But her heart, though broken by his abrupt departure, still belongs to Cody. The book is aptly titled—the main focus of the book is on Bailey's preparing to leave her home in Bloomington in pursuit of her dreams.

As Jenney, her mother, watches Bailey get ready to leave; she is both excited and sad. Meanwhile, Cody has left Bailey to protect her as he grapples with his mother being in jail. He takes a coaching position in a town nearer to the jail. A family friend who served at Ground Zero receives bad news about his worsening lung condition. These storylines are woven into the main story of Bailey's move to New York. If you haven't read any of Kingbury's other books featuring the Baxter family, you are missing out on some great reads! However, you can read this series without knowing background to Bailey’s life. Her books live up to their name as "Life-Changing Fiction," characters face significant changes in their life, and just reading about them often changes the readers. She has a gift for writing believable characters and telling a good story.

Carol R. Gehringer


PAP, 9780310327394, $12.99
Fic 362 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 3

Someone to Blame, by C.S. Lakin, provides a look into how one family copes with the heartache of deaths in the family. Tragedy prompts the Moore family to move to Breakers, a small town in
Oregon, where they hope to heal. Unfortunately, this doesn’t happen. Irene mourns the loss of her two sons, Casey misses her brothers, and Matt remains withdrawn and miserable in his grief, tormented by his part in his sons’ deaths. As each of the Moores struggle with their anguish, a stranger comes into their lives and stretches the family to their breaking point, yet he also holds the key to their healing.

Each of the Moores, must break before they can heal and change. The small town provides a close-knit community, yet, as the saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt. Lakin takes readers on a tense, emotional ride as each of the Moores deals with mourning their loss. The omnipotent point-of-view is a bit distracting at times. But the story is compelling as the full disclosure of the two boys’ deaths is slowly revealed. While the ending seems rushed and too neatly tied together, the message of looking into the heart of a person instead of the appearance is a strong takeaway message.

Pam Webb


PAP, 9781439153260, $14.99

Fic x, 305 p.; 22 cm.

Adult HS Rating: 3

Dr. Nicholas Mackenzie, an amazing intellectual, philosopher, and avowed atheist is excellent at using pure logic to discredit anyone who believes in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or any other religious beliefs. However, the logic of his world-view is put to the test when Travis, his computer-whiz brother, creates an artificial intelligence program that accurately replicates evolving human social interaction. By entering variables into the program and watching how the people and society in the AI program respond, Travis can essentially predict where the real world is headed. Unfortunately, every program he has run has ended in the failure of the AI society.

Nicholas is recruited to provide the perfect philosophical model that will allow the world to succeed. Nicholas gradually comes to the realization that to be effective, he must actually enter the AI world and reveal himself as their Creator/Programmer. An exact replica of Nicholas, created through sophisticated brain-mapping nano-technology, interacts with the AI society. As he begins to love the people, he understands that saving this world will require him to give up his life.

The God Hater, by Bill Myers, is an intriguing allegory that, as Myers says, “explains the logic of Divine intervention in the world, the dangers of living only by Law, the necessity for the Incarnation... all driven by a love that consider [sic] our lives more important than His [God’s] own.” The novel employs a few slang terms, and the use of the Lord’s name in vain once. Unfortunately, while the premise is intriguing, once the concept becomes clear to the reader, the novel quickly loses steam with its predictability. The added conflict of evil corporations trying to get their hands on the program by masquerading as FBI agents is insufficient to carry the story’s momentum to the end.

Sherri Beeler

In *On Hummingbird Wings*, by Lauraine Snelling, Gillian has a great corporate job in New York, far from the home of her youth and the mother she has avoided seeing for the past several years. Gillian is forced to return home, however, when her sister, Allie, calls with the news that Gillian’s mother, Dorothy, believes she is dying and refuses to get out of bed.

Gillian arrives to find Dorothy’s yard and garden, once tended with great care, now brown and dead—a parallel to the husk of a woman that her mother has become through irrational fear and depression. As Gillian struggles to help her mother reclaim her life, she is assisted by neighbors and friends. In working to restore her mother’s garden, Gillian also restores her own life, develops new relationships, and renews her faith in God.

While it is clear that Gillian’s mother suffers from fear and depression, the novel creates a great deal of unrealistic mystery about the issue, and it takes an enormous amount of time for Gillian and the medical doctors to arrive at this diagnosis. And while Gillian grows in her patience and love for both her mother and her difficult sister, again, no explanation is given to the mysterious issues that Allie seems to be dealing with that make her interactions with Gillian so touchy and challenging.

Despite the weakness, the novel develops a good and genuine friendship between Gillian and her single neighbor, Adam. Snelling also realistically addresses Gillian’s struggles to decide where she belongs in her life and career, and addresses the complexity of parent-child relationships when the roles are reversed and the child must “parent” the adult.

PAP, 9780764207327, $14.99  
Fic 310 p.; 22 cm.  
Adult Rating: 3

Set in the beach communities of North Carolina’s Outer Banks, *Hatteras Girl* by Alice Wisler, is contemporary fiction. Jackie Donovan has two prayers: to marry a wonderful man and to own a bed-and-breakfast on the Outer Banks.

Jackie lives on the Outer Banks, dresses like she is always on vacation, and writes about local businesses for the local newspaper. She also goes on blind dates set up by friends and relatives, always meeting them in the same spot: at Sunnyside Grille where her childhood friend, Buck, works. She dreams of buying the abandoned Bailey House to run as a local bed-and-breakfast.

Some family friends once owned the Bailey House and Jackie spent many happy afternoons there. But it has strange stories and a hefty price tag attached to it. When Jackie meets the handsome and unattached Davis, the realtor listing the property, she believes God may be answering both her prayers. Then after contract negotiations are completed and renovation at the Bailey House begins, she learns some disturbing details about his past. As she digs further into those details, she risks losing both dreams as she uncovers the truth.
Alice Wisler has written a contemporary story with delightful characters set on North Carolina's beaches. Although there doesn't seem to be significant character or spiritual development, this book is an easy summer read and a clean romance. The best parts are the description of the beach communities and its local characters. One is transported there by the descriptions. However, the biggest weakness is the first-person viewpoint which doesn't draw in the reader in the same way as the description of the locale and its characters.

Recommended for high school collections and public libraries.

_Carol R. Gehringer_

_Sisters of the quilt : the complete trilogy / Cindy Woodsmall. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 0._

PAP, 9780307729958, $19.99
Fic 1004 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Best-selling author Cindy Woodsmall presents three contemporary Amish novels, published as a single collection. Readers follow Hannah Lapp’s journey from her childhood in the Amish community, to her adjustment into the outside world, and finally to a decision of which to call home.

In _When the Heart Cries_, young Hannah faces the aftermath of being raped. Her fiancé and her family are overwhelmed with their own feelings, unable to help Hannah. When her brother and his girlfriend are seriously injured, he blames Hannah because she wasn’t with them, causing a further rift in their family. The final straw is her pregnancy and the gossip spread by her own sister.

Rejected by her loved ones, Hannah leaves her Amish community to seek refuge in the outside world, in _When the Morning Comes_. Her sister begins to lose touch with reality. Meanwhile, Hannah is training to be a nurse and meets a man who seems to understand and encourage her dreams. As she struggles to find her place in this _Englischer_ world, her Amish community deals with truth revealed after her departure.

Two years later, Hannah reluctantly returns to her Amish community in _When the Souls Mends_, to help her sister. Her former fiancé is her sister’s doctor. The truth about others’ actions is unveiled. Hannah must make the final choice to return to the Amish life or be with the _Englischer_ man who adores her.

These books have good plot and character development. The reader connects to Hannah as she faces pain, broken relationships, and miscommunication in her struggle to find refuge and restoration. Though Hannah is raped, the scene is not graphic in detail.

Recommended for public and school libraries.

_Carol R. Gehringer_


PAP, 9780425237946, $14.00
Fic 291 p. ; 19 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

In a second, life can change irrevocably. Jason F. Wright builds upon this well-known truism in his new novel, _The Seventeen Second Miracle_.

For Rex Conner, it is a summer of promise with a teen's dream job as a lifeguard at the
local beach. He likes his job and loves a girl—and then he averts his gaze for a mere seventeen seconds and his life changes forever.

Those changes continue on in Rex's son, Cole. Cole takes his father's mistake and uses it teach a selected group of teens the value of grace and redemption. For the past decade he has achieved measurable success. Yet, this year is different and Cole will have to learn from his own mistakes.

For those who enjoy Chicken Soup stories and Angela Hunt's metaphorical novels, The Seventeen Second Miracle is a book to place on the must read list. It's heartwarming without being overly sentimental, and delivers a few lessons all can learn from. Wright's plot line, while at first formulaic, takes a couple of surprising turns and goes from human drama to mystery, returning to a riveting drama of merit. Each character is engaging and realistic, and Wright's ending is an unexpected bonus. The additional reader's guide makes this book an easy choice for a reading circle.

Pam Webb


PAP, 9781416587507, $14.99

Fic 413 p.; 21 cm.

Adult (HS) Rating: 3

Blood Bayou is a murder mystery with a feisty female protagonist. Camille's stormy marriage to Jack Vermillion ended seven years ago, and she hasn't looked back. Instead, she uses her skills as a lawyer to create Truth Project, which helps prisoners who have been wrongly charged. However, freeing one man sets off a dangerous chain reaction of revealed secrets and murders. Camille finds herself in the middle of the controversy and back in contact with her former husband, who left his troubled past to become a pastor. Though she is drawn to the changes in Jack, their chemistry continually sparks former tensions as they find themselves being stalked by a killer.

Karen Young provides all the needed elements for a great mystery read: an action-filled prologue, a strong cast of characters, a dynamic plot laced with twists and red herrings. The overriding sub-plot is Camille's struggle to understand Jack's conversion to Christianity and how it has transformed him from a violent, self-centered man to a man of God. Young deftly explores Camille's own struggle with faith issues while dealing with attempts on her life. While embellishing details and implausible plot points tend to divert attention away from the drama at times, the initial suspense of the murderer's identity is carefully held back until the right moment. Readers of Terri Blackstock and Brandilyn Collins will appreciate Young's contribution to the murder-mystery genre.

Pam Webb

HBB, 9781601423436, $12.99
231/.8 vi, 117 p.; 19 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

In The Goodness of God, Randy Alcorn acknowledges that suffering is a universal condition that exposes inadequate theology and challenges personal philosophies. He invites the reader to measure questions of faith by the plumb line of scripture.

The first chapter defines the origin and reason for evil. References to the contemporary tragedies of the 9/11 attacks, the Holocaust, and other atrocities validate the concept that good was corrupted by original sin and evil became a “parasite on God’s good creation.” Evil is not a simple absence of good, but rather a malevolent force released by sin to cause the “ever-expanding consequences of suffering.”

Other chapters review the reality of inherited sin, prominent alternative theories about God’s power, and the role of suffering in the redemptive work of Christ. The author contrasts divine love and satanic evil when he frames the question of why God permits it to exist and delays justice. He refutes the belief that Christians are entitled to material prosperity and provides a scriptural basis for his conclusions.

Despite its small size, this book provides a wealth of absorbing content. Randy Alcorn offers eleven rich chapters crammed with truth in this short 117-page volume. He entices us to explore the reasons for our trials, find perspective in light of the Bible, and comprehend God’s solution. The book concludes with an appeal for the reader to receive eternal life.

Mr. Alcorn addresses some of the most perplexing questions that trouble people who face tribulations. His investigations of relativism, atheism, and the “problem” of goodness offer ample material to satisfy the person who is searching for solutions.

Those who find themselves ambushed by anguish will find Randy Alcorn’s commentary enlightening and helpful. Those with faith damaged by tragedy will find answers to encourage and soothe the conflicted soul.

Deborah H. Rabern


HBB, 9780800719913, $21.99
B or 270/.092 279 p., [16] p. of plates : col. ill. ; 24 cm.
Adult Rating: 5

Choosing to SEE is about Mary Beth Chapman’s life as wife to musician Steven Curtis Chapman. She pens the story of God’s hand on her life from her childhood through recent tragic days. As she wrestles with questions of God’s presence and providence, Mary Beth shows how to have hope even in the darkest times.

Mary Beth Chapman shares briefly about her childhood to give a background to the woman she became. The book mainly revolves around her life as wife and mother. She meets Steven while she was in college, describing those early days of marriage as “Tigger meets Eeyore” in terms of their personality differences.
Mary Beth candidly talks about being diagnosed as clinically depressed and the impact of it on her family life.

Mary Beth also discusses how they came to adopt three girls from China: Shaohannah Hope, Maria Sue, and Stevey Joy, expanding their family to six children. In May 2008, their family faces a tragic event. The book shows how God is present in the midst of their family tragedy and continues to bring healing to them.

Choosing to SEE is a moving story of heartache, loss, healing, betrayal, and encouragement. Mary Beth writes transparently of her and her family’s struggles. The author shares from her personal journals during the darkest chapters of her life. By doing so, she allows the reader to see that even in the hard times, there is hope. Spring will come after the winter, if we choose to see His presence.

Highly recommended for public and church libraries.

Carol R. Gehringar

Listen to the children: conversations with immigrant families / Elizabeth Conde-Frazier


PAP, 9780817016616, $13.99
305.9/06912 128 p.; 21 cm.
Adult Rating: 4

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier suggests that the best way to help an immigrant family successfully integrate into their new home is to listen to the children. The book is for immigrants, their families, and those connected to them, and shares the point of view of each person involved. It helps you step into the shoes of the immigrant, their children, and tells their story in a loving and compassionate way.

Each chapter in Listen to the Children focuses on a different part of immigration. In Deciding to Leave—and Telling the Children, it suggests to always be straightforward and affectionate during the departure. Reuniting with Children in a New Land covers how hard it is for parents to become the authority figure after the separation. Making Adjustments to a New Life, Education and the Next Generation, The Family’s Legal Status, The Role of Religion, and Faith Communities all deal with the family’s social life. And Children and Raids relates how to help the children that are left behind if their parents are taken by immigration authorities. Each chapter has fictional conversations between family members that help describe what the family is going through.

The writing is clear and relationship-driven. The author makes no political statements but suggests how to help immigrant families. She gives solid, practical advice on what to do and what questions to ask when a family is struggling. She emphasizes how the love of Jesus and prayer can completely heal a broken family.

She concludes with describing one helpful community: “this community recognized the contributions of their immigrant friends were making to the richness of the fabric of their lives together... It is how we create spaces of worthiness and equality for every human being.”

Ellie Soderstrom

When helping hurts: how to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor...and yourself / Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert.
help in three stages: 1) Relief, 2) Rehabilitation, and 3) Development. The authors argue that poor, inner-city Americans typically do not need the first stage, relief, since doling out handouts only increases the god-complex of the rich and the inferiority complex and unhealthy dependence of the poor. Lest the rich say, "No need to give, then!," the authors argue that rehabilitation and development will actually require more giving. It’s comparatively easy to hand out food; it’s hard to lovingly help someone whose life is scarred (both by his sin and his society’s sin against him). It’s even harder to develop a whole community full of people in that position. But it can be done, and Christians should start doing it.

The book avoids the error of ignoring the poor’s spiritual needs. It says clearly that only divine grace in salvation will truly solve anyone’s problems. It is written in a popular style which would be appropriate for any Christian or church leader.

Mark L. Ward, Jr.

Dogspeak: how to learn it, speak it, and use it to have a happy, healthy, well-behaved dog / Bash Dibra, with Mary Ann Crenshaw; illustrations by José Dennis. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. LCCN 99030194.
PAP, 9780684865485, $17.99
636.7/0887 270 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.
Adult HS Rating: 3

Despite what its title implies, DogSpeak does not reveal a magical method for carrying on a conversation with the family pet. But it does provide plenty of useful advice for living with dogs—from choosing the right breed to coping with the inevitable loss of a canine friend.

In the introduction to DogSpeak, Bash Dibra shares the story of his childhood connection with some guard dogs at a Yugoslavian camp where his family was interned for three years. Not only did his interaction with the wolf-like creatures ease the hardships of internment for the youngster, the lessons he learned formed the basis for Dibra’s career as an acclaimed dog trainer and author.

Written in an easy, conversational style, DogSpeak lives up to its name by showing readers, through words and illustrations, the
“vocabulary” dogs use to communicate. By learning to interpret a dog’s stance, the position of his tail, or even his facial expressions, an astute observer can “see” what’s going on in a dog’s mind.

Dibra likens it to a game of charades. But in this case, the game becomes the key to unlocking the language of dogs. Understanding that language, he says, can increase a human’s chances of establishing a successful relationship with man’s best friend.

For veteran dog owners, this book will provide little more than a different slant on training issues and insight for addressing them. But for new or prospective dog owners, it can be a useful and comprehensive guide to choosing, training, and caring for dogs. Thus, most dog owners—or people who want to become one—might find *DogSpeak* a worthwhile read.

*June Mathews*

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**Outlive your life : you were made to make a difference / Max Lucado.**


HBB, 9780849920691, $24.99  
248.4  
xxi, 212 p.; 25 cm.

**Adult Rating: 5**

In the latest offering by Lucado, the focus is on the book of Acts. The author gives incidences in the lives of the early Christians, and then relates comparable instances in our modern world. The discussion and action guided by David Drury presents questions for group meetings, followed by suggestions of things to do to carry out the theme of each chapter.

Lucado states that we each have a unique life, and by the time we realize it, we are well into it. No one else has the same version of life as ours. We will never meet a person exactly like us. What we do with our life makes the difference. Max asks, “Would God do with us what he did with his first disciples?”

Ours is the wealthiest generation of Christians ever. We have the ability to learn more, travel farther, become more education, and experienced. We are truly blest by technology. If we followed the example of the Jerusalem church, we could evangelize the world in a very short period of time. So why are we not doing it? When our life is over, what will be said about us? Will we outlive our life, or are we merely existing, taking up space on the planet? Will our lives be ones that mean something to others?

Lucado gives examples of people who follow the example of the early apostles. They are regular folks, people he has met through the years, who have made a difference where they live.

In sixteen chapters, this book is filled with stories of inspiring people who did unusual things. Like all Lucado’s books, this one is a winner.

*Juanita Wier Nobles*

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**The questions Christians hope no one will ask : (with answers) / Mark Mittelberg.**

Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2010. LCCN 2010031769.

PAP, 9781414315911, $14.99  
239/.7  
327 p.; 21 cm.

**Adult Rating: 4**

“How could a good God allow so much evil, pain and suffering—or does he simply not care?” Definitely a question relevant today, but how do you answer it? *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* tackles this question successfully, and nine others Christians are likely to hear in their daily adventure for Christ.
Mittelberg looks at each question from several perspectives—personal, other Christian’s thoughts, some non-Christian thoughts, almost good answers, and a wide scope of scriptural data. He then gives a summary of the best answers and tips for conversation with non-Christians. Each chapter closes with questions for group discussion.

Working in both apologetics-oriented outreach and evangelism strategy, Mark Mittelberg is also a prolific Christian author, noted for his *Becoming a Contagious Christian* training course. He uses all his expertise, plus a solid grounding in scripture and a personal reliance on his Lord to present usable information for you and me as we seek to share Christ with those around us. His last chapter is particularly helpful. Moving from defense to offense, he gives us questions to ask those who question us, such as: How did the universe become so precisely tuned? Have you ever read the Gospel for yourself? *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask* is informative, interesting, and challenging reading. It is useful as a reference book for laymen and cleric, and makes a good study book for a church group.


HBB, 9780446559850, $23.99

230 viii, 287 p. : ill. ; 24 cm.

Adult Rating: 4

Philip Yancey poses universal questions that plague us all in *What Good is God.* His personal and journalistic quest for spiritual truth sends him across the globe, even as he comes to terms with his own narrow escape from annihilation.

The prevalent theme throughout the book is God’s grace that shines through the darkest times. His query about the unfairness of circumstances and the senseless tragedies of life always find the answer that Christ is indeed present.

Mr. Yancey reminds us of the horror of the Virginia Tech massacre that left a campus of students searching for answers. He takes us to China where underground churches thrive and martyrdom is a daily risk. Still, he finds his faith strengthened and encouraged by the evidence of God at work across the nations of the world.

This book divides into ten sections. The beginning of each section sets the stage for the author’s concluding address to a group. Although the text is not in chronological order, the speeches date from 2003 through 2009 and cover a diverse range of topics. A double page spread of black and white detailed drawings by illustrator Klaus Ernst adds a rich dimension to the text.

The author discusses the sex worker’s dilemma, reviews the impact of C.S. Lewis, discusses South Africa, Memphis, and revisits his Bible college days. He touches on the Church in the Middle East and the Mumbai terror attack. One of his most provocative chapter titles is *Why I Wish I Was an Alcoholic.*

Mr. Yancey is adept at weaving the truth of the Gospel throughout his narrative, pointing the reader to Christ in each chapter. The beauty of divine grace surfaces through the most unlikely places to give the reader a prism through which to consider contemporary events and would make a great addition to your bookshelf.

*Deborah H. Rabern*

PAP, 9780764207310, $16.99
261.8/35766 239 p.; 22 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Mark A. Yarhouse is a professor at Regent University, where he directs the Institute for Study of Sexual Identity. Dealing with this issue in modern times and in the church presents a dilemma for every Christian.

Many studies have been conducted, but most are inconclusive. The American Psychological Association has concluded that there are more questions than answers in this area. On the question of whether one can change from homosexuality to heterosexuality, studies show this rarely happens. Concerning the causes of homosexuality—though many studies have been done, nothing has been proven. This is not something someone chooses, it is what one experiences.

Yarhouse suggests a three-tier distinction in the matter of sexuality: attraction, orientation, and identity. Sexual identity begins from as young as age ten or twelve, then moves to behaviors at about age thirteen or fourteen. By age fourteen, one begins to question his or her identity, followed by labeling at about age fifteen. There is an identity dilemma, followed by identity development, and finally one reaches an identity synthesis. However, the Christian has an additional burden because of the teachings of the church.

Too many times in past years, the church has turned away from the needs of Christians who are attracted to those of the same sex. Yarbrough says church leaders and friends should accept them, recognizing all people as image-bearers of God, and stand together with believers who are sorting out sexual identity concerns. The church should remove the stigma associated with this struggle and encourage those who are trying to live faithfully before God.

As the parent of a gay adult, I found this book helpful and insightful. I would recommend it to anyone who is experiencing a situation where a loved one has announced a gay identity. I would also recommend it to church leaders who want to understand more about people who experience same-sex attractions.

Juanita Wier Nobles


PAP, 9781601423184, $11.99
261.2/43 94 p.; 17 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Who wouldn’t want to eavesdrop on a conversation between the central figures of two major world religions? In The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha, author and Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias affords readers just such a hypothetical opportunity from a Christian perspective. This insightful exploration of the relations between Christianity and Buddhism is cast as a dialogue between Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha. Writing from extensive personal and philosophical interaction with the Christian and Buddhist traditions, Zacharias renders a highly philosophical discussion accessible to a broad audience through the portrayal of religious ideals within concrete life situations.

The content of the discussion
is infused with thoughts drawn from the Bible and Buddhist writings. The central issue of the nature and reality of the self predominates as the key to discernment between Christianity and Buddhism. Inescapable human suffering is brought to the foreground by the introduction of a third party to the conversation, a woman whose tragic life presents a test case to crystallize the teachings of Jesus and Buddha. Their respective systems of thought and modes of life are applied through numerous opportunities to embody compassion among suffering human beings.

Overall the volume is well organized, each participant’s contributions being indicated clearly. Through an introduction, a prologue, and an epilogue, the author offers helpful commentary on the impetus for and content of the dialogue proper. Interspersed throughout are decorative pages accentuating particularly pithy and important quotations isolated from the main text.

Mature adults, particularly those interested in interreligious and intercultural engagement, will find this book an informative and challenging aid to exploring the relations between Christianity and Buddhism. More mature young adults may benefit from this introduction to the most crucial points of contrast between these two faith traditions, thereby developing a clearer understanding of their own.

Bradley A. Poteat


PAP, 9781601423191, $11.99
261.2/45 88 p. : 17 cm.
Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Is there truth behind the veil of reality as we experience it? Can we press forward through that veil to see and hear it for ourselves? In New Birth or Rebirth?: Jesus Talks with Krishna, author and Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias considers these questions from a Christian perspective. This installment of the Great Conversations series explores the relations between Christianity and Hinduism by way of an imaginary conversation between Jesus Christ and Krishna. Written from a background of extensive research and interaction with the Christian and Hindu traditions, Zacharias weaves together fundamentally contrasting views of reality into a witty yet profound exchange between two faiths.

The content of the discussion is drawn from the Bible and Hindu literature, with specific reference to ancient as well as contemporary Hindu thought. Central issues include the differences between truth as historically grounded reality versus mythology, the nature and attainability of the path to God, and the destiny of individual human beings. The most insightful passages explore what the author sees as logical inconsistencies in Hindu teaching from sources widely considered authoritative among Hindus. Along the way, the book provides historical perspective on the development of Hindu thought in general.

The dialogue is well organized, each participant’s contributions being indicated clearly. An introduction and a prologue offer helpful commentary, including how this volume relates to the series as a whole. Frequent
decorative pages accentuate important summary quotations derived from the main text.

Reflective adults, particularly those interested in the philosophical underpinnings of religious thought and life, will find this book an instructive and fruitful aid to exploring the relations between Christianity and Hinduism. More mature young adults may benefit from this introduction to the most crucial points of contrast between these two faith traditions, thereby developing a clearer understanding of their own.

Bradley A. Poteat
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