

SUMMER READING 2008

PICTURE BOOKS

Picture books are often discredited as being just for young children. Libraries usually give them a call number beginning with 'E' because they are for Everybody. I have made a note of those that are best for those who are little bit older than a child who fits on a lap.

Necks Out for Adventure by **Timothy Ering** should appeal to folks visiting the ocean as its hero is a long neck clam who saves them all by sticking his neck out. The illustrations are appropriately watery and a little wacky.

A Taste of Colored Water by **Matt Faulkner** is set in the American South in the 1960s. Two white children from a small town hear that the town has fountains with colored water. They imagine how wonderful that must be and finally convince a parent to take them to the city. When the adult goes off, leaving the kids in the car with stern warnings not to get out of the truck, they suddenly spy a fountain with a sign above, "Colored". The result is a powerful way of talking about Civil Rights as seen through the eyes of an innocent child. Children at second grade and above will find much to think about in this book.

Velma Gratch and the Way Cool Butterfly by **Alan Madison** is a story all too familiar to children with impressive older siblings. Velma has two older sisters who made a positive impression in first grade but folks barely notice poor Velma, even with her wonderful, curly red hair. Soon Velma is obsessed with the butterfly unit. Something amazing happens on the class field trip that assures her place in the memories of everyone at the school.

Zen Shorts by **Jon J. Muth** is a few years old but is well worth finding. A giant panda comes to town and teaches the kids some simple lessons based on the Buddhist stories that he tells. The illustrations are perfectly soft and inviting and the stories are simple and to the point. It can be read as one story or as a few short ones. The second in the series, *Zen Ties*, is nice but I don't like it quite as much.

Gimme Cracked Corn and I Will Share by **Kevin O'Malley** is filled with corny, groan inducing puns. The story is a retelling of an old tale of dreams of treasure that lead right back home. In this version, chickens dream of cracked corn. I have had kids laughing out loud, but it takes someone old enough to understand all the jokes.

Apples and Oranges: Going Bananas with Pairs by **Sara Pinto** fits perfectly with things that I learned at the "Habits of the Creative Mind" workshop last fall. The book pairs two things that have ties and asks how they are alike. Instead of the obvious answer, the book suggests, for example, that neither a cupcake nor an ice cream cone go scuba dancing or that neither a spoon nor a fork dance ballet.

***Not a Box and Not a Stick* by Antoinette Portis** are supremely simple tales of a little critter who has a box or a stick. While the author's voice asks questions, the critter always replies that it is NOT a stick or box. The minimalist illustrations show just what is being imagined and are sure to inspire other imaginings.

***Waiting for Mama* by Lee Tae-Jun** is charming story was first published in a Korean newspaper in 1938. Recently it was reprinted with truly lovely, soft illustrations that meld perfectly with the soft story of a little boy waiting at the train station for his mama.

***When a Monster is Born* by Sean Taylor** is bright and colorful with a simple repetitive pattern. It begins "When a Monster is born it can either..." and then gives two options. If the first option happens things are fine and things go on without change but if the second thing happens it will lead to two other options and so on. The book ends by coming full circle when a new monster is born.

CHAPTER BOOKS

As readers mature, it becomes harder and harder to offer a general list. This list is just a beginning. There is a book for everyone if you all take the time to find it.

***The Underneath* by Kathi Appelt** will appeal to someone (probably grade 4 or older) who loves animals and is an accomplished reader up to the challenge of an unusually literate writing style. It follows the lives of a dog and some cats who have had less than good experiences with humans. Together they deal with life and some fantasy. It is unlike any other children's book I know.

***Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam* by Cynthia Kadhota** is moving both as a dog story and a war story. When a young boy must give up his beloved dog because of a move, the dog is sent to serve with the military in Vietnam. The story offers the story of the dog while looking at war and heroism in new ways. Students in grades five to seven will find much to enjoy in this novel. Look at other Kadhota books, *Kira, Kira* and *Weedflower*, for quality writing about the Japanese American experience.

***Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney** is a hit with boys in grade four and up because its illustrated journal format and funny, flippant story capture well the joys and agonies of being a boy in the middle grades. It's about time that boys got such an enjoyable, readable, and right-on-target book just for them.

***The Willoughbys* by Lois Lowry** When most people think of Lois Lowry they think of the dark dystopia of *The Giver* or the horrors of the holocaust in *Number the Stars*. This wonderful short novel for grades 3 and up shows her humorous side. It is a wonderful send up of "old-fashioned" stories like *The Secret Garden* or Horatio Alger. It features kids who long to be orphans so their lives can be as good as those they read about in old books. I don't know if kids will find all of the humor, but I loved this story.

***Clementine* by Sara Pennypacker** is the first in a series for second and third graders about a charming, uninhibited, well-meaning, but surely trying-to-her-teacher, little girl. She is one of those kids who try so hard to be good that she can be awful. She is a little like Ramona and a little more advanced reading than Junie B. Jones.

***Life as We Knew It* and *The Dead and the Gone* by Susan Beth Peffers** are for middle school and older readers who are up for a very depressing look at the future. These two titles look at the same crisis from two different view points. The first is the journal of a 15 year old girl in the middle of Pennsylvania while the second title is written about a young Latino boy in New York City. Both have to deal with the after effects of an asteroid hitting the moon and throwing it out of orbit in such a way that the earth's tides and climates are severely altered. Though this seems a little outrageous at first glance, these titles make it seem all too real.

***Travels of Thelonious: Book 1 of the Fog Mound Series* by Susan Schade and Jon Buller** may be the perfect summer (or winter, spring, fall) read for just about anyone in grades 3 to 7. That wide age range reflects all that these stories have to offer. First of all, they are a pleasure to read because they change from text to graphic format with each chapter. Then the stories are filled with adventure and humor and clever animals that can talk to each other. Some of them even believe that humans once existed outside legend.

***The Arrival* by Shaun Tan** has not a single word in it but its amazing pictures tell a poignant story of what it feels like to be an immigrant. The new home of the protagonist is purposefully unlike any place so it becomes very place that is unfamiliar. It deserves many re-readings to catch all of the subtle messages. Every age above about grade 4 will find something different to appreciate with each re-reading.

YOUTH NON-FICTION

Adults sometimes doubt that children like non-fiction but if circulation numbers in the library are any indication, many children much prefer fact to fiction.

***Manfish: A Story of Jacques Cousteau* by Jennifer Berne** offers a biography of the famous oceanographer in a lovely picture book format that will appeal to grades one to five. It follows the life of Cousteau from his inquisitive childhood to his famous explorations.

***Emi and the Rhino Scientist* by Mary Kay Carson** is one of a series of books on scientists who study various animals in their natural environments and in zoos. All are beautifully illustrated with photos of the scientists at work. The text focuses on the scientist at work while including plenty of facts. It is hard to finish these books without having a new love for the animal at hand. Who knew that rhinos were so cute? Grades three and up will find much to enjoy with any of the books in this series.

***Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale* by Carmen Agra Deedy** is a wonderfully lush folk tale. This lovely young cockroach (and she is lovely) is being courted by several young critters. Luckily she has the good sense to follow her grandmother's advice—when interviewing a prospective husband, spill coffee on his shoes to see how you will be treated as his wife.

***Blue Lipstick: Concrete Poems* by John Grandits** will especially appeal to middle school girls. The poems are touching, funny, and always inventive. It often takes some convincing to get teens to read poetry but I expect that those who get their noses in this book will be very glad they did.

***Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People* by Albert Marrin** is a marvelously illustrated book for every student in grades 3 to 7 who is as fascinated by rats as I am. Here you will find facts and folklore about rats that will make you appreciate this often distained and amazingly intelligent rodent.

***Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow* by James Sturm and Rick Tommaso** does not claim to tell a strictly historically accurate story but does relate a story that could have happened. Told in a graphic format, this story begins simply with a young man who wants to play in the Negro Baseball League but is almost immediately struck out by Satchel Paige. The man returns to his hometown to work as a sharecropper and suffer repeated humiliations from the white land-owners until Satchel Paige comes to town and makes a statement about civil rights, using the language of baseball. Students in grades 5-8 will enjoy the story and find the message that is so well conveyed.

***Math Fables, Too* by Greg Tang** and the many other titles by Tang are technically non-fiction with a focus on math facts mixed with lots of fun. The format is that of a bright, colorful picture book with simple rhymes that lead the reader to discover how many wonderful ways that numbers can be combined. Tang's books vary in their appeal for different math skills and thus different ages.

***The Girl's Like Spaghetti and Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynn Truss** take Truss's successful adult grammar text into useful and entertaining picture books. One book admires apostrophes and the other contemplates commas. In double page spreads they delightfully illustrate the importance of the proper placement of these vital punctuation marks. The reader must be old enough to understand a little about punctuation and jokes to appreciate these books. Adults may well learn something as well.

***How to Speak Dog* by Sarah Whitehead** gives readers in grades three and up a good introduction to dog behavior and training. The many photos convey information clearly and the clever quips make the book an enjoyable read.