

My Reading Journal

Jennifer Thompson

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Literature and Literacy for Children

Professor Ellen Loughran

Picture Books:

1. Aylesworth, Jim (1992). *Old Black Fly* (S. Gammell, Illus.). New York: Henry Holt and Company.

An old, black fly annoys a household in an energetic, alphabetical journey, finally coming to a satisfying demise. The repetitive text is full of rhymes, with a song-like quality. The text is also patterned and well-paced, which makes it predictable and fun for children to play along. Gammell's multi-watercolor paintings are energetic and full of splatter, giving the paintings a Jackson Pollack-inspired feeling. Static lines give an abstracted view of the humans and the fly in the story.

The characters are not precious- many are ugly and slightly distorted. The paintings' frenetic qualities mimic the flight of the fly, and naturally lead the eye of the reader from one page to the next. The book is appropriate for ages 3-7. The story is best for read-alouds with classroom-size groups of children due to its sing-song nature, although it could be used as a lapbook.

2. Baker, Leslie (2003). *The Animal ABC*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

This concept book helps babies and toddlers learn the faces of 26 animals as well as the alphabet. Because this is a concept book, there is not much text. There is only the name of the animal and the letter that the animal represents. The print has a large, clearly defined typeface for both the letters (represented by both capital and lower-case) and the name of the animal.

The illustrations (also by Baker) were created by using watercolors on Montval paper. The watercolor paintings are realistic, soft and gentle. The large drawings, found in the center of the page, are done on a pastel-colored background. But parents beware: you might not know some of the animals – like Nuthatch (bird) and a Uakari (primate). Appropriate for babies and toddlers in a one-on-one setting.

3. Barracca, Debra, & Barracca, Sal (1990). *The Adventures of Taxi Dog* (M. Buehner, Illus.). New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Inspired by a real taxi dog, the Barraccas tell a charming tale of a homeless dog invited to accompany a taxi driver throughout multiple adventures in a city. The structure of the book divides one page of text with one drawing interpreting the text. The text has some patterned language and a definite rhythm. The rhyming lines are done in an indented fashion, which makes it very easy to read and keeps the pace up. However, some of the text has long sentences. The text is also given on white backgrounds with a taxi-like checkerboard frame on each page.

The beautiful, bright artwork by Mark Buehner was done by putting oil paints over acrylics. Even though the artwork is colorful, it has dark undertones to it, suggesting an urban area. Buehner's artwork is full of many characters, so children will discover new things with each read. The lines are sharp and distinct and many of the shapes are three-dimensional (especially on the first page). Also, the illustrator uses Maxi's (the dog) view in many shots, so the reader can see what it's like to see from a dog's point of

view. Appropriate for ages 3-7. The book works well in either a group setting or one-on-one.

4. Bartone, Elis(1993). *Peppe the Lamplighter* (T. Lewin, Illus.).
New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.

A Caldecott Honor Book, this story takes place in turn-of-the-century Little Italy, where a young boy named Peppe attempts to help his struggling family by getting a job lighting lampposts in the neighborhood. Peppe tries to prove to his father that he can help provide for the family and triumphs at the end. The book is a bit clichéd, with a perpetually angry father and helpless sisters, but provides some inspiration at the end. This picture book is different than most. The text is smaller, and there are paragraphs on certain pages. There is no rhyming, no rhythm and no patterned language. This is essentially a transition book with beautiful artwork.

The illustrations by Ted Lewin are nothing short of stunning. By using dark watercolors, Lewin helps the reader to picture the neighborhood and the sadness in the immigrants' lives. The lighting of the characters is symbolic – whichever one is the most well-lit is the focus of that particular page. The book is for older children (7-11 years) due to its lengthy text and heavy subject matter. The book's background and focus would definitely benefit by an adult's explanation. This book could be read by children studying American history or on a one-on-one basis.

5. Bemelmans, Ludwig (1939). *Madeline*. New York: Puffin Books.

An absolute classic, *Madeline* is a precocious young girl living in Paris. In this first book of the series, she suffers from appendicitis and is rushed to the hospital. The book has simple and small amounts of rhythmic words on each page. Each *Madeline* book begins the same way – with 12 little girls in two straight lines, walking and brushing their teeth. This provides stability, structure and predictability to the readers of the series. The book is well paced and never overwhelms the reader.

Bemelmans drawings depict exactly what is being said in the text. If he speaks of 12 girls in two straight lines, the drawing above it shows it. Bemelmans color drawings provide a lovely view of Paris. To me, the depictions of the Parisian landmarks look like chalk drawings on a sidewalk – slightly messy but well outlined. By using landmarks, it helps children get a sense of Paris and its buildings. The story is wonderful for girls ages 4-8, either in a group or a one-on-one setting. Due to the simplicity of the words, children 6-8 could read the story on their own, but younger girls will need their parents' assistance.

6. Brown, Margaret Wise (1947). *Goodnight Moon* (C. Hurd, Illus.). New York: HarperFestival.

An ageless story, Brown and Hurd's tale of a rabbit attempting to fall asleep at night continues to engage children in many generations. The simple prose full of rhymes and easy-to-understand words entertains children and adults alike. The text is in large block print, making it easy to read for the child. There is patterned language throughout the book, providing repetition to the reader.

The pacing of the book is wonderful. There is a strong sense of "the drama of turning the page" in *Goodnight Moon*. At the end of each text block, the child will want to turn to the next page to see what's happening.

Hurd's drawings follow the words beautifully. The orange and green-dominated drawings are colorful and distinct. The viewer feels as though they are watching the action unfold from the invisible "fourth wall." Much of the text speaks of objects in the rabbit's room and Hurd's drawings help the child to find the objects being referred to. As the words become drowsier, so do the drawings, going from well-lit to dark (as if a light has been turned off). Appropriate for toddlers to 5 year olds, this book is a perfect bedtime story to be read to one or two children tucked into their beds.

7. Bunting, Eve (2002). *The Bones of Fred McFee*. (K. Cyrus, Illus.). Florida: Voyager Books.

This story is a spooky tale about children who discover and hang a plastic skeleton high in a sycamore tree. The first-person narration is nicely done. The text is ambiguous and allows the reader to think either the boy or the girl is telling the story, which helps the reader personalize it.

The text has a flowing rhythm and some repetition, which makes it easy for kids. The longest stanza on a page is 4 lines. The text is bold and the type size is good. However, some words are fairly big. For example, the word "sycamore" is repeated on almost every other page. Luckily, because it is repeated, children will learn how to pronounce it and will understand that it's a type of tree.

The illustrations are done in scratchboard and watercolor. Cyrus uses Halloween colors – there is quite a bit of orange and black. The drawings are dark and spooky and provide a scary atmosphere for the haunting rhymes in the story. The watercolors are outlined black lines, giving each drawing strong definition. Many of the drawings are two-page, and the pages are bound well so that there is no "sinking" of the drawing into the crease of the book. However, this doesn't leave any white space for the text. Given the darkness to the tale, it's best for older children – around 5-7 years old. The book could either be read in a classroom or library around Halloween in groups, or by older kids by themselves.

8. Carle, Eric (1974). *My Very First Book of Numbers*. New York: Philomel Books.

This concept book is designed as a split board, divided into quarter pieces. The top left quarter is blank, except for initial instructions at the beginning. Bottom left has, in large type face (maybe 48 or so), the spelling of the number and the spelling of the fruit representing it. The top right has the actual number plus an equal amount of black squares. The bottom right has a drawing of the fruit. Since this book is for babies and pre-

Kindergarten, children should work with their parents to match up the number with the amount of fruit depicted.

The drawings, also done by the author, are collages on solid white backgrounds. The drawings are vibrant and look like they've been done on paper. They are well-defined, large and leave lots of white space, making it easy to count for the children. Due to the nature of the split board concept book, it gives children a feeling of accomplishment when they can match up the fruit with the number. These are perhaps the beginning of the "puzzle" books.

9. Kasza, Keiko (1990), *When the Elephant Walks*. New York: Putnam.

This picture book depicts what happens when an elephant takes a walk. The elephant scares a bear and then the bear scares the crocodile and this pattern continues, forming a chain-reaction of funny animal fear. Eventually, all of the animals are scared by a little mouse. This charming book has many of the good picture book qualities. First, there is plenty of white space on the pages. The text is large print (18), and the book has the "drama of turning the page" structure. The reader must turn the page to discover what happens next. Although there are no rhyming words or phrases, there is good pace and a rhythm to the book. Each animal is frightened by the one before, until the end, when every animal is scared but the mouse! This gives fun predictability of the story to the reader.

The anthropomorphic watercolor drawings are hilarious. My favorite is the crocodile sunning his/herself with a cocktail by its side. All of the animals run on their hind legs and show human fear. Although the drawings of the animals are fairly realistic, the adding of human traits gives the story an absurd quality. This book is a great lapbook to be read to toddlers. It could also be read by early readers by themselves.

10. London, Jonathan (2005). *Do Your ABC's, Little Brown Bear* (M. Moore, Illus.). New York: Dutton Children's Books.

Little Brown Bear and Papa Brown Bear have a day of activities together while learning the ABCs. Playing baseball, getting in grass fights and climbing fences are just a few of the activities that the Little Brown Bear and the Papa Brown Bear do together. The story is done in 4-6 line stanzas. Unfortunately, the lines are not similar in length and none of the stanzas rhyme. The sentence structure is too complicated for kids to read on their own. There is a decent amount of white space around the words, but this won't help the kids decipher the sentence structure.

The drawings depict the letter each situation represents and help the child to associate the text with the drawing. Anthropomorphism is depicted in this book. The bears wear jeans and suspenders and do human activities. This will help children relate to the bears. The drawings have the look of watercolors defined by fine brown outlines. The bears' faces are sweet, with almost a dog-like quality. This book would be good for dads and their 4-7 year old sons to read to each other at home.

Easy Readers:

1. Bauer, Marion Dane (2003). *Snow*. (J. Wallace, Illus.). New York: Aladdin.

Snow is a fun book about how snow forms and when it falls. The story uses two girls depicting the actions that the text is telling the reader about. *Snow*'s content provides most of the requirements of easy readers. It falls into the category of realistic fiction books. The vocabulary is fairly simple. Only a few of the words, such as "twirling" and "crystals" are a bit too complicated. Certain words are repeated, especially the word "snow."

The main problem I had with the book is the Level that the publisher put on the front. The publisher thinks the book is a Level 1. I think it belongs in early Level 2. The majority of the sentences are between 4 and 10 words. However, I found quite a few 12 and 15 word sentence designs, which is too difficult for a beginning reader.

The design of the book is decent. The text has very large typeface – about 24. The first two pages are easiest to read – with one or two sentences on each. There is good space between words and good spacing between lines. However, there is no white space – the "white space" is either snow or clouds from the drawings. There are child-like, simple watercolor illustrations on each of the 32 pages. I enjoyed the end of the book. The end page has fun facts about snow that could be read to the child either by a parent or teacher.

2. Benchley, Nathaniel (1977). *George the Drummer Boy*. (D. Bolognese, Illus.). New York: HarperTrophy.

This book is about a young, British boy named George who plays the drums for the King's Soldiers on the eve of the American Revolution. George and a soldier friend named Fred get caught up in fighting and realize that they dislike war and want to go home. This realistic-fiction book is well done and provides the reader with a sense of how difficult war is for young men, no matter what time period. The vocabulary is not very complicated, but there aren't many repeated words.

According to the publisher, the book is a Level 3 (grades 2-4) story. I think the story is much too complicated for a 2nd grader, and although it is an "I Can Read" book, it's best for 4th grade. Although the sentences are mostly 7-15 words in length, the subject matter and plot are heavy.

The design is good for a Level 3. The spacing between the words and the lines are good, and the book has 1 to 2 sentences per page. The typeface is about 24 and the drawings are smaller than Level 1 and Level 2 books. The drawings are very interesting – the only colors used are red, white and blue (symbolic of both England and American troops). The drawings look as though they were done in a hurry, with blue representing nighttime and shakily drawn characters.

The end of the book is most interesting. The author felt he needed to write a disclaimer. It states that the book is his interpretation of how two soldiers in war would

behave and he reminds the reader that there are two sides to every war. The book is fairly controversial, and a parent should tell that it is a story about any war. Since the book was written in 1977, shortly after Vietnam ended, it's easy to see the parallels to the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam.

3. Cazet, Denys (2003). *Elvis the Rooster Almost Goes to Heaven*. New York: HarperCollins.

An egotistical rooster named Elvis can't crow one morning and thinks he's died and gone to heaven. Some of the other barnyard animals cleverly trick him into "living" again. The contents of this book have both positives and negatives. Some of the pages have word repetition ("ack" and "proud" are frequently used), and the plot is funny and full of farcical moments. However, none of the words rhyme and there are some difficult words in the text. "Tumbled" and "muttered" are two of the unusual words used in the text.

The design has some issues as well. Although the book has eight chapters and mainly 4-16 word sentences, some of the words are not written on white space. They're printed over the purplish-blue hued drawings, which could make the words difficult to see for an easy reader. However, the drawings are fun and mimic the text. I believe the book is an early Level 3. Due to the difficulty of the text being printed on dark color and the longer sentence length (as well as a sophisticated plot), children 7-8 would enjoy this book either as a group reading or on their own.

4. Cushman, Doug (1998). *Aunt Eater's Mystery Halloween*. New York: HarperCollins.

Aunt Eater, who happens to be an anteater, experiences spookiness during her four different journeys on Halloween night. The animal fantasy story is separated into four chapters, and each chapter represents a different event on Halloween night. There are no repeating words, but there is predictability in the plotlines. Each chapter ends with a joke and a "reveal" to the mystery in that particular chapter. The author uses simple vocabulary, but there are a few unknown words like "jig" and "jitterbug."

The watercolor drawings are cute, but nothing amazing. The story is definitely the focus of this book. Even though the pictures depict the text's content, the drawings didn't capture me as they have in other books. At the beginning of each chapter, there are pictures on only one side. There is a great use of white space. The text is a large 18 point, and contains 4-11 word sentences and 3-7 words per line. The one drawback to the design is that each chapter is 14 pages long, which could be daunting to a 7 year old. This Level 2 book (for 2nd graders, 7-8 years old) would be a fun book to read around Halloween. I don't see this being used in schools, but it would be fun if they read it on their own.

5. Rylant, Cynthia (1987). *Henry and Mudge in the Green Time* (S. Stevenson, Illus.). New York: Simon and Schuster.

An excellent example of a Level 2 easy reader, Rylant does everything right in this book. Henry, a young boy, and Mudge, his large dog, participate in three activities on a beautiful summer day. They go on a picnic, Henry gives Mudge a bath and they conquer a green hill. There is excellent repetition of key words like “ow” and “hurt.” The vocabulary is full of short, understandable words. Even though there is no rhyming, this is an easy book for children to understand. The plots of each chapter are short, fun and relatable.

The pen, ink and watercolor drawings are beautiful. They are complementary to the text and provide lightness to the story. They depict a child’s summertime (and adults’ memories of summer break) very well. The design is wonderful. 18 point font size is used and the sentences are between 4 and 17 words. Even though this may be slightly lengthy, there are good breaks in the sentences so the child’s eye can follow them quite easily. There are approximately 7 lines per page. There is good use of white space, spacing between the lines and between the words.

The publisher says that the book is a Level 2 reader, and I agree. Because it has up to 7 lines per page and the length of words per line mostly falls in the perimeters of these guidelines, I think young boys (7-8) who own pets (or want to own a pet) would definitely enjoy the entire series!

Bridge Books:

1. Adler, David A. (1992). *Cam Jansen and the Mystery at the Haunted House* (S. Natti, Illus.). New York: Viking.

This fun mystery revolves around Jennifer “Cam” Jansen, her best friend Eric and her Aunt and Uncle. Cam (nicknamed after a camera; she has a photographic memory) and Eric search for her Aunt’s stolen wallet at an amusement park. The book is 58 pages long and contains 8 chapters. Each chapter is around 8 pages in length. The typeface is large, around 18 points. There are 6-8 words per line, and some of the pages go up to 21 lines long. The book has justified right margins and reads like a “grown-up” book, even though there is good use of white space.

The vocabulary is great – simple and uncomplicated. The sentences are direct and short. The black and white drawings depict the action in the text and they appear on every other page.

The book is encouraging to young girls. Cam is mischievous, smart and fun. She’s adventurous and brings humor, mystery and chutzpah together. This series would be wonderful for 9-11 year old girls either to read on their own or to start a book exchange with their friends.

2. Amato, Mary (2004). *Snarf Attack: Underfoodle, and the Secret of Life: The Riot Brothers Tell All* (E. Long, Illus.). New York: Holiday House.

The stars of this book are Wilbur and Orville Riot, two merry pranksters who love to torment their mom and do creative activities. Wilbur, a 5th grader, and Orville, a 3rd grader, capture a thief, find a treasure in their home and overthrow a “king” in this three story book. This particular book is actually three “books” in one, for a total of 142 pages. This could seem overwhelming to anybody younger than 4th grade. However, there is one blank page before every chapter, so perhaps kids will feel “accomplished” after they’ve read it. The majority of the text is easy to understand and humorous. Overall, the vocabulary is simple and the sentence structure is uncomplicated. I only found one word, “rogue,” that would require a child ask their parent or teacher what it meant. Otherwise, the plots were incredibly enjoyable and I found myself cackling quite a bit.

Each story has six chapters and each story is around 40 pages long. The text is still in 18 point typeface. Fluctuating between 10 and 21 lines per page and around 10 words per line, it may be too advanced for some kids. However, the lines read well and go by very quickly. The books have justified right margins and a good use of white space. All of the spacing – between words and between lines – was wide.

The black and white drawings are cartoon-inspired and mimic the actions in the text. I also enjoyed drawings of lists and signs as part of the picture space. This creative use of space draws kids’ eyes to more text, even though they are tricked into thinking it’s part of the picture group.

This book is great fun for upper 3rd to 5th grade boys. The brothers are so much fun and never do any harm. Although I don’t think these books are good for any curriculum use at school, they sure would be fun to read at home, especially if a boy has a brother or a best friend to relate to the stories with.

3. McDonald, Megan (2005). *Judy Moody Declares Independence* (P.H. Reynolds, Illus.). Massachusetts: Candlewick Press.

Creative and feisty Judy Moody travels to Boston on a vacation with her parents and bratty little brother, Stink. Inspired by American Revolutionary history, Judy is determined to proclaim independence at home. This is a great book for advanced bridge book readers (late 3rd grade, early 4th grade). The book is 145 pages long, with 11 chapters. Each chapter is around 10-20 pages. However, it’s not as daunting as it seems. There are about 16 lines per page with large, 18 point typeface and good white space surrounding the letters, words and lines. There are also around 6-12 words per line. There are some longer sentences, some with as many as 20 words. The vocabulary is simple, but has many references to the American Revolution and America’s history. There is also great use of British words and phrases because Judy meets a new British friend named Tori.

The book has expressive black and white drawings on every few pages. Some pages have no drawings at all, and some pages have a “double page” drawing (no text on either side). I especially liked two of the drawings. First, at the introduction, there is a two page drawing of who’s who in the story. Also, the book jacket is great. It’s made of a

paper-bag like material that's placed (with peep holes) over red, white and blue drawings of Judy.

The book is made for more advanced bridge readers for a few reasons. First, there some of the drawings are actually postcards and lists, requiring the reader to read more than they're accustomed to. Second, the table of contents and the chapter titles are in a smaller, unique font that could be difficult to read for smaller children.

Overall, this book is great for 3rd grade girls. It's a great book for young girls that are asserting their independence and feeling more "grown up." The author mentions important women in history, such as Sybil Ludington, who normally don't merit a mention in traditional school history teaching. The book would also be great fun for a reader response program. A librarian or teacher could use a large map of Boston and have the children mark where Judy and her family visited in Boston.

Fiction:

1. Blume, Judy (1970). *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Margaret Simon, a 12 year old girl, moves from New York to New Jersey with her parents and struggles with making new friends, worrying about puberty and deciding her religious affiliation. The chronological, progressive plot follows a traditional narrative order: the story takes place during a 6th grade school year. The first person narrative, told from Margaret's point of view, provides the reader somebody with whom to identify. The character of Margaret is revealed mainly through her thoughts and through some actions. The primary characters, such as Margaret, her parents and her grandma, are well-rounded. Secondary characters, like Margaret's friends and her mom's parents, are flat. For example, her mom's parents are devout Christians, but that is all. However, I wouldn't call them stock characters. Each does have his or her own personality quirks.

There are two main conflicts in the book. First is a character vs. character conflict. Margaret has problems with kids in class, her friends and her parents. The second is character vs. society. In both conflicts, Margaret is the protagonist. Margaret's body and society are the antagonists. She desperately wants to start menstruating and wearing a bra and feels pressure to grow up once her friends begin puberty. The tone accurately reflects a 6th grade girl's thoughts and actions. Blume uses hyperbole (Margaret always thinks she's going to die in embarrassing situations) to demonstrate how 6th grade girls act and think. The ending of the book has two parts – one with resolution and one without. The resolution is that Margaret gets her period in the last chapter. However, she never resolves her issues and struggles with religion, which is realistic. No child is going to resolve a major issue such as religion in one school year.

The setting is realistic and also symbolic. Margaret and her family move from New York to New Jersey. Many of the readers have moved at least once during their childhoods and can relate to the difficulties. However, the change in environment also symbolizes the changes happening to Margaret. This story is about how bodies change and how we change mentally, too. Each reader comes away with a different take of the

book. When I was 10 and read the story, I focused on the parts about puberty and changes with my body. When I re-read the story this summer, I was much more focused on the religious elements. This book is excellent for 9-12 year old girls who are curious about their bodies' development or religion but are afraid to ask adults any questions. This contemporary realistic fiction book holds up over time.

2. Cameron, Ann (2003). *Colibri*. New York: Frances Foster Books.

Twelve year old Tzunun Chumil was kidnapped at the age of four by a strange man she's been forced to call Uncle. He believes she holds the key to a treasure and through her suffering and travels, she is able to strengthen herself to escape him at the end. The story's narrative order is chronological, but there are no exact dates in the tale. There are a few uses of flashback, when Tzunun (nicknamed Colibri, or "hummingbird" in Spanish) remembers certain things about her childhood and her parents. However, it's not disruptive to the tale. In fact, it helps the reader identify with the life Tzunun had before her kidnapping.

There are two conflicts in the story. First is character vs. character. Tzunun dislikes Uncle but is forced to remain with him so he can find a treasure that only she knows about. Ultimately, there is a protagonist (Tzunun) and antagonist (Uncle) showdown at the end of the book, which provides for a nice resolution. Second is character vs. self. Tzunun is constantly fighting herself and her feelings to run from Uncle. She is torn in two – one part believing she needs to leave him to discover her true self, and one part wanting to stay with him because she is all he knows.

The progressive plot, told in first person narrative by Tzunun, is full of suspense and foreshadowing. What is the mysterious treasure that Tzunun will lead the Uncle to? What is the piece of paper that Uncle owes Tzunun? Although the chapters don't end in cliffhangers, both of these questions are resolved at the end of the book. The character of Dona Celestina provides all of the foreshadowing. She is a Day-Keeper. She tells the future with seeds, but all of her prophesies are filled with vague representations of what will happen in the future.

There are not many characters in the story, but each one is three-dimensional and believable. Both Tzunun's actions and thoughts provide the reader a complete portrayal of the character. The setting is one of the most important aspects of the book. Because the story takes place in a handful of towns in the Guatemalan hills, it provides the reader with an excellent journey. The cities and people of Guatemala are realistic and do not condescend.

Cameron's writing style is full of metaphors and symbolism. Cameron uses comparisons of caves and Earth to symbolize warmth and strength for the characters. Also, when a cup with a heart on it breaks in two, Tzunun realizes that her heart, too, is torn in half.

The book has several important themes. The necessity of internal strength, never forgetting where you came from, and fighting for freedom are just a few of them. Cameron's novel could be used in a few ways. First, it could be read as part of a geographical and multicultural discussion in class when the students (between 5th and 6th grade) are studying South America and/or Spanish cultures. Second, it could be

read on its own by a girl who is struggling with her own self-identity and inner strength.

3. Curtis, Christopher Paul (1999). *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Yearling.

Ten year old Bud, orphaned by his mom 4 years earlier, runs away from an orphanage to travel the open roads to find his dad. During his journey, he discovers his true family history as well as meets a family he never knew he had. This Newbury Award winner follows a chronological sequence of events. Although there are occasional flashbacks to Bud's memories of his mom, the narrative is straight forward and easy to follow. The first person narrative gives a wonderful sense of Bud's voice and thoughts. The author uses beautiful imagery to express Bud's feelings, especially when he hears the band play for the first time. Curtis uses metaphors to describe Bud's feelings. For example, Bud compares his growing thoughts to a maple tree seed's growth into a tree. There is also use of allusion in a few sections, most noticeably when Bud is comparing mopping the floor to the plot of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.

The conflict is character vs. society. Bud's story takes place during the Depression. He is constantly struggling with how to feed himself and where he's going to live after he leaves the orphanage. His struggle is solved at the end of the book, but the reader is aware that his true struggles, as a black boy during the Depression, will probably continue on as they did for the majority of Americans during this time. Bud's appearance also gives the reader the impression that Bud is poor – his pants don't fit and his clothes are in tatters.

The progressive plot begins with Bud running away from a foster home and beginning his journey to find his dad. Along the way, Bud meets new friends and discovers music. Bud is the primary character and the rest are secondary to the plot. Bud is fully developed but some of the characters are stock characters. For example, many of the jazz musicians in the band use the hip dialogue of the day. However, they serve the purpose of moving the plot along.

There is no foreshadowing, but there is a sense of suspense. The reader is not sure if the person Bud suspects is actually his dad, so it does keep the reader turning the page.

The end remains partially open. The reader discovers that the man Bud thought to be his father is actually his grandfather. However, it's never confirmed that Bud will remain in his grandfather's care. The reader just assumes this at the end of the book to make for a nice resolution.

This book is a great example of historical fiction. While following Bud's humorous story, there is a sadness to the book that remains with the reader throughout. This book would be an excellent addition to a 4th grade class studying the Depression or the struggle of blacks in America. It would also be a good discussion book between a child and his/her parent. The afterword by Curtis asks the reader to ask their relatives as many questions about their lives as possible in order to learn and absorb their struggles. What an excellent idea – I hope some children read the afterword and do so.

4. Gaiman, Neil (2002). *Coraline* (D. McKean, Illus.). Maine: Thorndike Press.

Gaiman's horror story revolves around a young girl, Coraline, and a mysterious portal in her home. The portal, found inside a locked door, leads to a flat similar to her own but where her "parents" are actually evil creatures with a secret agenda. The narrative follows a chronological pattern over 2 or 3 days. There are no flashbacks in the progressive plot, which follows the general development, climax and resolution of the story. The author, using an omniscient point of view, allows for suspense and foreshadowing in the creepy tale. For example, the reader knows Coraline must exit the other world, but how can she do this?

There are two conflicts in the story – character vs. character and character vs. self. The most noticeable is character vs. character. Coraline despises Other Mother, and will do almost anything to escape her clutches. The character vs. self is less noticeable. Coraline is terrified of the unknown and spiders, but must confront both when rescuing her parents in the other world. By dominating her fear, she strengthens her resolve and ultimately succeeds.

Coraline is the only primary character. There are a handful of secondary characters that are one dimensional, such as her neighbors and parents, but they are not stock characters. Each has their own personality quirks that differ from the rest. Coraline's actions and thoughts separate her from the other characters. The omniscient narration allows us to understand and react to Coraline's actions throughout the story, allowing us to place ourselves in her shoes.

The setting of the story may be difficult for some children to understand. Although the story takes place in a small English hamlet outside of London, there is an entire world within it – a world without humans, with talking cats and with blank spaces of white that behave like mist and fog. Although children are much more willing to accept fantastical situations in stories, this particular setting could seem very abstract for some readers.

The book's tone allows for no sympathy towards any of the characters. It takes itself quite seriously and doesn't allow for much humor. However, because of the tone, the book takes on a chilling, sinister quality. The imagery is excellent – it provides for stark, barren rooms to come alive in the reader's mind. The reader can easily picture the black button eyes of Other Mother and her cruel, bone-white hand.

Even though this is a fiction book, there are a handful of drawings throughout the tale. The drawings are crude and done with either charcoal or a pencil. The black and white drawings add more creepiness and shivers down the reader's back. Often the drawings reflect a portion of the plot that has either just occurred or will happen soon. The drawings also add to the overall theme of the book. For most readers, it will be open to interpretation. However, one of its main points is to notice that having whatever you want is not necessarily for the best. To want is a necessity in life – otherwise, life could be exceedingly dull. This suspense book would be best read by a 9-12 year old child under the covers of his or her bed with a flashlight. However, parents need to be next door, just in case...

5. Ibbotson, Eva (1994). *The Secret of Platform 13* (S. Porter, Illus.). New York: Puffin Books.

When a young prince from a mysterious island is kidnapped by a woman in London, many creatures are sent from the island to rescue the boy. Their success is dependant upon their secrecy and the boy's wishes to return. The progressive plot is told chronologically, although quite a few years apart. It begins when the prince is a 3 month old baby, and jumps to when the prince is 9 years old and living in London. Although this may seem too big of a jump, the author's writing makes it seem as though not much time has passed and doesn't make it difficult for her readers.

The author's use of suspense keeps the pages turning. The reader anxiously waits to find out who the true prince is and wants to make sure that the islanders don't take back the wrong boy. There are two conflicts in the tale. The first conflict is character vs. character. Although the prince expresses no ill wishes towards the family he works for, he is constantly aware of their annoyances and rudeness. The other conflict is character vs. society. The prince handles himself beautifully in London but is constantly aware of his need and desire to belong to another land. He is never mystified by otherworldly creatures, such as hags and ogres, and feels much more at peace with them than most humans, with the exception of his nanny.

I had some problems with the characters. The primary characters are the true prince, Ben, and his nanny. These were the only two that felt well rounded. The other characters are flat – unattractive ogres and hags and wise, old wizards. The main problem was with the family that kidnapped Ben and ultimately gave him to the nanny. The mother and son are constantly portrayed as “piggies” and “fat.” This stereotypical look at overweight people really unnerved me, and after a while I found myself counting the use of the word “pig” and its other forms. The author is clearly a creative woman; she doesn't have to make mentally unattractive characters overweight for the reader to understand their horridness.

The omniscient point of view works well in fantasy books. In a fantastical setting, such as an island with kind rulers and happy people, it gives more freedom to the occasionally unbelievable story and provides for a voice of reason. The writing style focuses on imagery. Because many of these creatures and the island do not truly exist, the story relies on imagery to make the book come alive. Unfortunately, the black and white drawings that accompany certain parts of the text are terrible. They look rushed and lead no credence to the text. For a reprint of the book, I'd recommend that the drawings be removed.

The author's tone is mostly fun and carefree. Exaggeration is a natural companion to fantasy. The reader must believe that an ogre can knock a child out by tapping him on the head with a pinky finger. However, I had a hard time adjusting to her views of the mother and son. I can't help but imagine if these characters were of a minority, would she use such harsh descriptions of their physical appearance?

Non-Fiction

1. Freedman, Russell (1993). *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery*. New York: Clarion Books.

A Newbery Honor Book, Freedman's biography of Eleanor Roosevelt covers her entire life. His glowing praise of the former First Lady's perseverance and growth throughout her life is showcased in a chronological format. Freedman begins with Roosevelt's childhood and ends the tale with her death. Not much is said about Freedman's credentials in the front or back of the book, but the Newbery Honor Book award gives much credence to his writing. Also, by searching his name on the internet, I discovered he's written many biographies of historical figures that he admires. Also, his acknowledgements page shows that Freedman spoke with many people regarding Roosevelt, including the staff at the FDR Library in Hyde Park and Curtis, her oldest living grandchild. The documentation is good. Freedman provides all of his sources on the acknowledgement page and provides for further reading.

The biography is well organized. There are 11 chapters, beginning with history on her parents and her childhood and progressing chronologically until her death. This makes it easier for the reader to follow Roosevelt's life. The photographs lend excellent support to the text. All of the photographs are black and white and come from different sources. They match the text and are clear reproductions of the original photographs. The photographs help the reader put themselves into the time period.

The design is excellent. Each page has some text in decent sized print with white space. This is definitely a more sophisticated book and best for 6th through 8th grade. There isn't as much white space as in most children's books, but there are numerous photographs, either covering half pages or whole pages. There is a contents page at the beginning of the book listing each chapter, and there are some great additions at the back of the book. There is a photo album of Eleanor Roosevelt, a description of the author's visit to Val-Kill, Roosevelt's true home and additional books about Eleanor Roosevelt. This extra information is helpful to the reader in case the reader would like to read more about the subject.

Freedman's writing style presents a praiseful tone towards Roosevelt. He doesn't reflect poorly upon her at all – instead, he focuses on her contributions towards America and the UN. Unfortunately, this can be a common problem with biographies – some glorify the person and rarely look at the darker side. He makes sure not to mention any rumors regarding Roosevelt, such as suggestions that she was a lesbian. Although his overview is fairly glossy and full of praise, it would make for an excellent addition to a 5th or 6th grade class studying American history and how women were important contributors to our history.

2. Hawass, Zahi (2004). *Curse of the Pharaohs: My Adventures with Mummies*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society.

Author Zahi Hawass has a respectable background. He's an archaeologist and the head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt. He's discovered many tombs and mummies throughout Egypt and is widely regarded as an important figure in the field of archaeology. Alas, this does not make him a good writer. He is an in-house resident for National Geographic, and somebody in that company must have thought it to be a good idea for Dr. Hawass to write first-person narrative. On the surface, it seems to be an excellent idea. But it definitely doesn't work.

First, the organization of the book is poor. There are six chapters each dedicated to the rumored Egyptian curses that come with destroying a resting place. These six chapters could have easily been edited into two chapters. Hawass consistently repeats himself and tells the same stories but in different contexts. In one chapter, he'll explain a possible tragedy of the curse. A few chapters later, he'll explain what truly happened to the person. And then he'll backtrack and say perhaps it was "Egyptian Magic" that caused the entire disaster.

The photographs, however, are the one exception in the book. They are excellent and showcase the tombs, mummies and pyramids wonderfully through clear and colorful prints. My only complaint is that only one woman is shown in the photographs. Perhaps this is because women do not regularly excavate tombs in Egypt. However, a young girl and a female writer for National Geographic are shown in favorable lights in one small section. Most of the photographs are half to full page in size (taken by numerous photographers) and the majority of photos are in color. The pictures match the text and make the text seem better than it is. It makes me wish that National Geographic had removed all of the text and just made a picture book.

The overall design of the book is good. The eye-catching photos and the fun title make it attractive to children. The book also has six appendices in the back. He provides tips for an archaeologist, a chronological map of Egypt's past, how a mummy is made, a description of Gods and Goddesses in Egypt, a glossary, a resources page and a large index. However, the reader quickly discovers that the book is all gloss and no substance. The writing style is poor. Although Hawass reminds the reader of a charming grandfather spinning a tale, it should have been cut down greatly because of numerous repetitions and bad editing. A few times, Hawass seems to be dictating into a microphone without the use of an editor. For example, he states at one point "...I was almost banned forever from the department forever!"(2003).

The book uses a good combination of primary and secondary sources. Hawass himself is an excellent primary source, since he discovered many of the objects he talks about. He also uses numerous secondary sources, listed in a bibliography at the back of the book. It also includes further reading suggestions and websites for more up-to-date information.

If a child wants to read about Egypt and its curses, this is a fun book to start with. However, it's best used for the photographs and occasional stories. It may help with a research project about Egypt for 5th and 6th graders, but the child will definitely need a few more resources in order to give a more well-rounded look at Egypt.

3. Swinburne, Stephen R. (2002). *The Woods Scientist* (S.C. Morse, photog.)
Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Swinburne's non-fiction book focuses on Susan Morse, a naturalist and wildlife tracker located in Vermont. She lives and works in forests and provides interesting information on the behavior of wild animals. Swinburne's editor, Ann Rider, is also a naturalist and provides excellent guidance to the book's content. Swinburne is also careful with his language - he never uses male pronouns (unless he is talking about a particular person) and seems to include every type of person in his writing. Morse's photography

also excels at inclusion - she includes numerous photos of females and children of different racial backgrounds.

The enumerative organization of the book is logical. Although they are not labeled as chapters, there are four separate sections with clearly labeled titles at the top. The book begins with background on Morse and how she became interested in forests and wildlife. Each following section talks of the different animals in the forest, why certain animals are becoming extinct and how to keep the forest in a natural state. The chapters start with the easiest subject (the photographer of the book) and then move on to more complex areas. At the end of the book, there are some excellent additions, shown on green colored paper (as opposed to the white paper throughout the book). There is a "challenges to you" page, urging the reader to become active in their own environment. There are also points on how to help your local forest and a page containing additional information on Morse's organizations. The author also provides a glossary and an index.

The photographs are brightly colored and realistic. They show a wide range of people in the forest working on activities as well as photos of the animals. My favorite photos were of the measurements of how big certain animals' tracks are, comparing them either to a pocket knife or a tape measure. The photographs work well in the design. The type face is large, and there is good use of white space. Each page is perfectly balanced with a photograph or two and text, so as to not overwhelm the reader. The headings are in a green colored typeface and italicized. They stand out from the regular text and are easy to read.

Swinburne's writing style provides a neutral tone to the story. The true energy comes from Morse's quotes regarding the forest and the habitats of the animals. The author makes sure to point out that Morse's opinions are hypotheses and not fact. Since Morse provides all of the information to Swinburne, there is no secondary source information in the book. There is, however, further readings suggested at the back.

I learned a great deal about forests and animals when I read this book. I had no idea that the moose population in Maine is booming, and how that might not necessarily be a good thing. It's great to read about a female scientist who has a passion for nature and wants to help our environment. The book's organization and clear photos helped make the story flow and fun to read.

4. Sandler, Martin W. (2003). *America's Great Disasters*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

The eye-catching cover and interesting title first drew me to this book. The author is well known and had one of his books nominated for a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* honor. His acknowledgements mention that he contacted numerous authorities on each subject at certain historical societies, museums and libraries. The enumerative organization of the book is good. There are nine chapters, each with its own subject. The subjects range from sea disasters, floods to fire, hurricanes and blizzards. However, there is no index at the end, which was disappointing.

Some photographs are grainy and hard to see. Others are clear. All photos, including the ones about Mt. St. Helens, are in black and white. There are also copies of paintings and drawings, which are mostly poor reproductions of the originals. I didn't think any of the photographs or drawings helped the text. Although they depicted the text,

they didn't add depth to the book as a whole.

The design of the book is decent. The cover and the title grab the reader's attention. The chapter headings have large type face and are slanted. The typeface of the text is large and the book has decent white space surrounding the words. Each chapter begins with an overview of a particular natural disaster. Then, a subheading with the "worst" disaster begins the tale. Each page also has borders framing the text, which add a nice touch. The pictures have a good amount of white space around them and they each have captions that are in a different, lighter font type than the text.

The author's writing style is decent. He has an excitable tone and presents secondary evidence through pictures, letters and newspaper articles from each disaster. Although occasionally boring, his information is well-informed and full of facts. I would recommend a re-write of this book to include something on Hurricane Katrina. Even though the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 still remains the worst hurricane on record, some currency involving modern day tragedies would make the book more relevant to children who have experienced a disaster in their lifetime. However, sometimes it seems as though the author could have shortened the length of the chapters because of repetition.

I did not like his documentation of sources. Under the section "further reading," the author states "there is not enough space for me to list all of the books, magazines (sic) articles, newspaper reports, and other materials that were vital to the research I conducted for *America's Great Disasters*." (2003). This statement actually ruined the entire book for me. I find it condescending and egotistical to think that he did not believe that including all of his sources was necessary to the book. Although he lists additional resources as well as more specific books on the disasters, not listing all of his sources is an easy way to dishonor the credibility of his book.

The additional reading will provide 4th and 5th grade children with other good materials if they are writing a research paper on a particular disaster. This book could be used in light combination with it. However, I'd be very wary in recommending this book to kids because he refuses to acknowledge all of his sources.

5. Woog, Adam (1999). *The History of Rock and Roll*. California: Lucent Books.

Woog's book is part of the World History Series. The book is shiny and well made, but the credentials of the author are questionable. To start, the "about the author" section only lists Woog as a music fan. It states he's written other books on rock and roll legends. However, when I search his books on Amazon, I find out that he's also written about religion, sweatshops, Bill Gates and killer whales. How can one person possible be an expert on all of these subjects? I find it impossible.

The book's organization is clear. The nine chapters are chronological, beginning with the first days of rock and roll to where rock is now. Unfortunately, the book is dated. By ending in 1999, the book lacks in currency and desperately needs a revision. The design of the book follows a strict pattern. Each chapter begins with one or two quotes about rock and roll, and each chapter has one or two boxes with text that include quotes from critics and other authors of rock and roll books. There are also three to four subheadings per chapter which help form the text. The book ends with an epilogue (where is rock and roll going?), a further reading page, a works consulted page and an index. One overwhelming aspect of the book is the footnotes. The author uses 117

footnotes for a 112 page book. While it's impressive that he's done a great deal of work on the book, 117 footnotes could overwhelm the reader.

The black and white photographs are clear and match the text. Some chapters have more photos than others. The only disappointment with the photos was the lack of women. He has only two photos of women artists, which I find to be unacceptable.

The author's writing style is clear and concise... for a much older reader. Some 5th and 6th graders could comprehend the author's words. However, I found his writing to be too sophisticated and complicated for children. Woog uses difficult words and phrases and speaks in technical jargon that could be scary to young readers. Even some adults would find his descriptions to be a bit difficult. The book should be in the YA section, not in the children's area.

At times, the book feels like a long research paper. The book would be best used as a reference tool for students. Woog does a good job at balancing the attractive aspects of rock and roll with the unattractive. He doesn't provide a glossy look at the subject, which is admirable; he talks about payola and the difficulties of getting white people to accept black music. Only true music aficionados would be interesting in reading the book the entire way through. However, it would be quite useful if a sophisticated student is writing a research paper on either a specific artist or the roots of rock and roll.