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Children's Books

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Children's Books

I Want To Go Home. Written by Alice McLerran. Illustrated by Jill Kastner. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10018. ISBN: 0-688-10144-5. 1992. 32 pp. US\$15.00.

Reviewed by Maureen A. Hart

When Marta and Mama move to a new house, Marta is convinced it will never be "home." Her new bedroom walls are peppered with yucky purple and yellow flowers and the closet shelves are too high for her to reach. When Mama gives Marta a cat named Sammy who also had to leave his comfortable home, Marta pretends she doesn't care. But soon Marta's attention shifts from her own feelings of displacement to concern for Sammy and his adjustment to his new home — the home he now shares with Marta and her mother. In attempts to comfort and persuade Sammy that he will adjust and eventually be happy in his new house, she convinces herself. McLerran's simple story line deals sensitively and realistically with the emotional upheaval of change. Kastner's illustrations are double spread, making the book ideal for reading aloud to a group of children. Children who have experienced a difficult move will relate to Marta's initial unwillingness to call her new environment home and her longing for her old familiar surroundings. The reassuring ending makes this an upbeat and timely tale for our increasingly mobile society.



*Reviewed by Susan Miller
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An Evening At Alfie's. Written by Shirley Hughes. Mulberry Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY. ISBN: 0-688-11520-9. 1992. Softcover, unpagged. US\$3.95.

Shirley Hughes has penned another delightful story about Alfie and his sister, Annie Rose. In this book, Hughes weaves a bedtime story about Noah's Ark and a leaky pipe in the household into a memorable tale that will be loved by all. Throughout the book, the soft illustrations add to the beauty of the story — making the characters as unforgettable as any childhood adventure. This tale of a babysitter, a bedtime story, a drippy pipe and a wet diaper will appeal to the child or parent who shares the full color illustrations and the humorous, realistic storyline. *An Evening At Alfie's* is an addition to the Alfie episodes that surely will be treasured!

Look Alive. Written by Elaine Scott. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-09937-8. 68 pp. US\$14.00.

This wonderful book takes the intricate topic of the film and print industry and depicts it comprehensively through text and illustration. Using the familiar character of Ralph S. Mouse from Beverly Cleary's books aids in developing an understanding of making videos. Stop-action animation and other special effects are used to explain how clay figures can be brought to life on the screen. This book is sure to be a popular title. An easily understood text, a thorough index and a generous use of black and white photographs (to illustrate the written descriptions) make it an obvious choice for the young and curious.

What's So Special About Being Special?

Poison Ivy and Eyebrow Wigs. Written by Bonnie Pryor. Illustrated by Gail Owens. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11200-5. 1993. 162 pp. US\$14.00.

*Reviewed by Dona Icabone
Western Michigan University*

Poison Ivy and Eyebrow Wigs — the title was intriguing enough to pique the interest of my nine year-old daughter. Just what were eyebrow wigs? And why would someone need them? Although the book answers these questions, more importantly, it details the adventures of fourth-grader Martin Snodgrass as he tries to determine what is "special" about him. With a mother who is town mayor, a father who is the beloved town doctor, an older brother who is a skilled athlete, an older sister who is in classes for gifted and talented, and a two year-old brother who excels at "cuteness" — poor Martin. What was *his* specialness? The book describes his journey as he tries to answer that question. It's a lovely journey that we enjoyed sharing and would make an excellent book for a teacher to read aloud to a third or fourth grade class.

Awe and Reassurance

Around Me. Written by Erica Magnus. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-09756-1. 1992. 24 pp. US\$13.00.

Great world, huge and limitless; tiny world, in which a child towers like a giant over pebbles and flowers and birds — Erica Magnus' artistry awes and reassures through brief, lovely text, and the ingenious pattern of her beautiful book for children. Each four page arrangement presents the same combination: a page of brightly chalked color on the left, a full page picture on the right — these pages separated by a leaf

with a cutout square in its center, so that first there is a glimpse of the picture that lies ahead, then on the reverse contrasting colors of the page itself and the square of color from an earlier page. Beneath the cutout square, the brief text on these pages runs as a caption: "The world's so big... and even so it fits me." (JMJ)

A fast-paced, philosophical tale

Stop, Thief! Written by Robert Kalan. Illustrated by Yossi Abolafia. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11876-3. 1993. 24 pp. US\$14.00.

Cleverly combined text and pictures produce a charming children's book — and capture attention also for an elegant, understated philosophical treatise on property rights. Does the acorn belong to the squirrel who dug it up ... or to the squirrel from whose tree it fell? Should ownership be the right of those with special powers (the crow who flies, the otter who swims), or of those who outweigh others (as a dog outweighs a fox)? Or should it be those who know how to *use* the acorn who should possess it as a reward for their knowledge? *Stop, Thief!* would enrich as well as enliven courses in economics or ethics. It also fulfills admirably its primary function as a fast-paced, action-packed read-it-again storybook, with simple text young readers can quickly master, and illustrations that delight the eye. (JMJ)

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Multicultural Literature

If I Had a Paka. Written by Charlotte Pomerantz. Illustrated by Nancy Tafuri. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11900-X. 1993. 28 pp. US\$14.00.

The lilt of language enables the poet's voice to instruct as it delights. In Samoan, the words for *owl* and *secret* are similar: "Owl, owl, I've a secret" becomes "Lulu, lulu, I've a lilo." What fun to know these words, to learn and to discover the origins of words which are gifts to the English language from many countries and cultures. The title of Charlotte Pomerantz's intricate, ingenious collection comes from a cumulative chanting of Swahili words: "If I had a paka — meow, meow, meow, meow — I would want a mm-bwa — bow wow wow wow." No need for translation here, with ample clues from the text and from Nancy Tafuri's crisply beautiful illustrations. Each of the poems is different in style: a fairytale told in verse (Serbo-Croatia); a list of colorful Native American words; a Yiddish lullaby, each celebrating the joy of diversity.

Where Are You Going, Manyoni? Written by Catherine Stock. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-10352-9. 1993. 48 pp. US\$15.00.

The author of *Galimoto* has written and illustrated another engaging children's story set in Zimbabwe. Manyoni sets off early in the morning on the long path beside the Limpopo River, the forest of palms and fever trees, the sandstone kopjes, eventually meeting her friend Tula, and finally arriving at school in time for a few minutes of play before the beginning of the day. In an Author's Note, Catherine Stock describes the way she, like Manyoni, walks long distances as she sketches African wildlife and scenes. Also included are a glossary defining words from the Venda language used in the story; and labeled, miniature pictures of the wildlife shown in the illustrations throughout the book. (JMJ)

Adolescent Torment and Triumph

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes. Written by Chris Crutcher. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-11552-7. 1993. 224 pp. US\$14.00.

Trapped with genetic predispositions which are his only link to a pudgy father who deserted his wife before their child was born, Eric Calhoun endures the nickname of Moby bestowed by classmates with more socially acceptable physical styles who get a kick out of the "great white whale" allusion. Sarah Byrnes, also a social outcast, has no cruel nickname. She insists on always being called by her full name as a defense against the recurring realization of fellow students that her last name is a wonderfully apt play on words: Sarah's face is permanently, dramatically scarred from burns she acquired when she was three. The novel's title reflects one of its themes: the stressful decision faced in some form by all adolescents of deciding whether to show loyalty to friends by refusing to grow and change. Eric joins the swimming team, but confounds his coach for a year by working out exhaustively without losing any weight — a feat deliberately accomplished by massive overeating, so that he can swim and still not betray his friendship, "staying fat for Sarah Byrnes." As the plot progresses, a rich array of characters are introduced: other students including two ministers' children and the son of a town derelict; their very diverse families; and a larger than life, though still believable, group of teachers and administrators — some monsters, some miracles.

Chris Crutcher, a counselor working with children, adolescents, and their families at a mental health center in Spokane Washington, writes young adult fiction and adult novels, including a recent suspense thriller focused on child abuse: *The Deep End* (William Morrow, 1992). *Staying Fat* has terrifying sections, but is rapid-paced, eventually optimistic, and compellingly readable. The author's dedication is "to all those who finally stand up for themselves." (JMJ)