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# Of Cabbages and Kings: Celebrating Award-Winning Children's Books

BY LEAH VAN BELLE

The images of book award medals have become such a familiar sight on book covers that a kindergartner pointing to the image of the Caldecott medal on the cover of *The Lion and the Mouse* (Pinkney, 2009), recently told me in a conspiratorial tone, "See that? It's so good it got a PRIZE! We're gonna like this book!" And so we did.

More and more, we're teaching our students to celebrate award-winning authors and illustrators. Mentioning the awards and honors associated with a book has become just another part of giving a book talk or introducing a new guided reading book so that we can help students look for outstanding books on their own. Expanding the middle school canon with Newbery Medal, Coretta Scott King Book Award, and Pura Belpré Award winners and honor books enriches readers' literacy, and these engaging books can help motivate struggling readers. Book awards matter because great books matter. Great books help children affirm themselves while also discovering the amazing world and perspectives beyond their own lives.

In an education climate of high stakes testing and accountability, we have to remember to look at books not only as mentor texts to help students become better writers or with an eye for which GLCEs we can teach with them. We need to remember to see the amazing potential wonderful books present for touching children emotionally, aesthetically, as well as intellectually. When we find amazing books that we're passionate about, we need to share that excitement with our students. Putting amazing books in kids' hands isn't just about the books; it's also about sharing our passion for great writing and gorgeous illustrations. It's about nurturing lifelong readers and learners. Inspire your students with some of this year's winners of the American Library Association book awards!

## Randolph Caldecott Medal

**Stead, P.C.** (2010). *A sick day for Amos McGee*. (Ill. by E.E. Stead). New York: Roaring Book Press. 32 pp. ISBN: 9781596434028. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Erin and Phillip Stead are not only collaborators on this year's Caldecott Medal-winning book, but also husband and wife residents of Ann Arbor. Erin Stead combined woodblock prints and pencil to create illustrations that have a lightness of hand to them not normally seen in woodblock, but rather with the softness of watercolor and pencil sketches. In this, her first children's book, she evokes the perfect gentle feeling for the story of a kind zookeeper who finds himself very well taken care of by his animal friends when he comes down with a cold and has to spend a day at home instead of at the zoo. The penguin keeps Amos' feet warm. The rhinoceros is right there with a handkerchief for Amos's sneezes. The elephant plans cards with him and sets up the chessboard on Amos's bed. Stead's illustrations go beyond matching the text, to extend it with playful humor and small details that bring so much warmth to the story—the whereabouts of Amos's teddy bear, what happened to the red balloon the penguin came bearing with love, the bunny slippers that Amos wears. The magic of Stead's artwork is that it is precisely the gentle synergy of so many charming details that make these illustrations truly magical.

*Leah van Belle is an associate professor in teacher education at Madonna University in Livonia, Michigan. She has served as a member of the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award Committee, the Coretta Scott King Book Award Committee, and the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Roundtable of the American Library Association. Her educational consulting and research are related to literacy, curriculum, diversity, and children's texts.*

### Honor Books

**Hill, L.C.** (2010). *Dave the potter: Artist, poet, slave*. (Ill. by B. Collier). New York: Little, Brown and Company. 40 pp. ISBN: 9780316107310. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Dave Drake lived as an enslaved person working as a potter on a plantation in South Carolina in the late 1800s. His pottery was not merely the functional kind; his vessels were works of art, masterfully crafted and engraved with lines from his poetry. Dave's poems were haiku-like in their brevity and words that said so much in so few: "I wonder where / is all my relation / friendship to all— / and, every nation." Hill's text matches the sparseness of Dave's poems and the end matter provides readers with further information about this gifted artisan and poet, as well as photographs of some of Dave's surviving pottery. A fine book with those elements, Collier's illustrations, done with the brilliant multimedia artistry that he brings to his body of outstanding work, breathe life into the text. Drawing on colors of the earth that echo the clay Dave shapes with his knowing hands, Collier's work imbues the story with grounded warmth, while also including images, such as cotton picking, that convey the reality of enslaved people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This outstanding work of illustration

also earned Collier this year's Coretta Scott King Book Award for Illustrator.

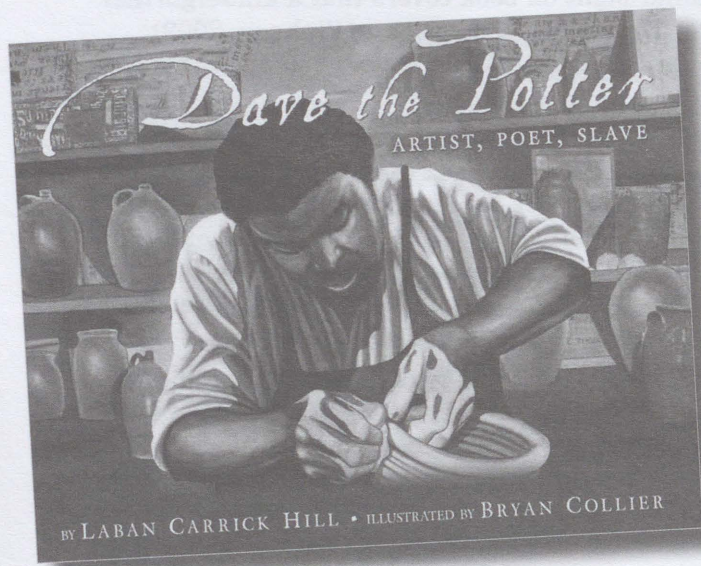
**Stein, D.E.** (2010). *Interrupting chicken*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. 40 pp. ISBN: 978-0763641689. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Stein has created a character spilling over with the eager enthusiasm and lack of impulse control that are endearing in very young children and beloved literary characters alike. (Think Mo Willem's Pigeon, A.A. Milne's Tigger, and Ian Falconer's Olivia.) Bedtime stories with Little Red Chicken take a long time, especially when she frets about the fate of the characters and interrupts Papa Rooster's read aloud so that she can save them with her own fractured twists to the fairy tales: "Out jumped a little red chicken...and she said, 'DON'T GO IN! SHE'S A WITCH!' So Hansel and Gretel didn't. THE END!" Stein's multimedia illustrations perfectly convey Little Red Chicken's inimitable spirit and energy.

### Theodore Seuss Geisel Award

**DiCamillo, K., & McGhee, A.** (2010). *Bink and Gollie*. (Ill. by T. Fucile). Somerville, MA: Candlewick. 96 pp. ISBN: 9780763632663. (Hardcover); \$15.99.

How perfect that a story about a pair of devoted friends was co-written by two authors. Bink and Gollie may be complete opposites physically (one tall and elegant, one short and perpetually messy), but they share a sense of adventure and imagination that can create grand adventures out of the everyday—how much more exciting to share a sandwich on top of the Andes than at the kitchen table! This is an early reader that gives young children an engaging and wonderfully written story to read while learning to read. The book combines short sentences and strong picture support. Beginning readers will love Bink and Gollie, and love being able to read the book on their own.



### Honor Books

**Lin, G.** (2010). *Ling & Ting: Not exactly the same!*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. 43 pp. ISBN: 9780316024525. (Hardcover); \$14.99.

Six short stories open up for us the charming world of Ling and Ting, twins, but each unique in her own way. Sisters and the best of friends, they see each other through awkward haircuts (sneezing during a haircut = crooked bangs!) and trying to use chopsticks (*not* as easy as it looks). Outings to the library, learning magic tricks, and making dumplings are doubly fun when done with a twin sister, and readers will enjoy the humor and playfulness in the duo's short tales.

**Willems, M.** (2010). *We are in a book!*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children. 64 pp. ISBN: 9781423133087. (Hardcover); \$8.99.

Elephant and Piggie are back at their usual silliness—hooray! Willems has proven himself to be a master of the early reader with these characters whose series has become so quickly beloved. This time Gerald the elephant and Piggie realize they're not alone in the book... someone is out there: "It is...a reader! A reader is reading us!" And the meta-story begins, with Gerald cracking himself up one moment at getting the reader to say the word banana, and panicking the next when he realizes the book is going to end soon. Beginning readers will gladly follow his plea to read it again.

### Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award

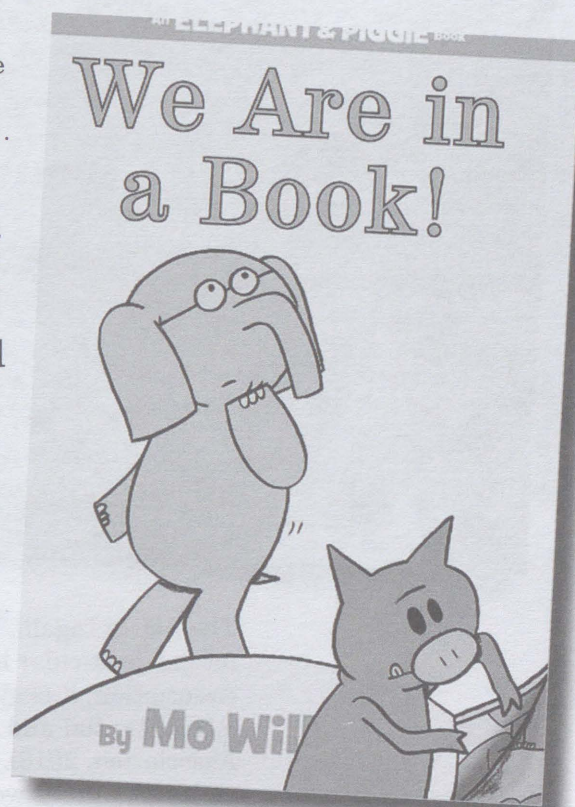
**Montgomery, S.** (2010). *Kakapo rescue: Saving the world's strangest parrot (Scientists in the field series)*. (Photos by N. Bishop). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 74 pp. ISBN: 9780618494170. (Hardcover); \$18.00.

When Nic Bishop gave the keynote address at the Literature, the Child, and the Teen Conference of the Michigan Library Association (<http://www.mla.lib.mi.us/>) in 2009, he shared his stunning photographs and stories of his adventures working on his latest collaborative effort with Sy Montgomery. The duo have now earned their third Sibert award for this outstanding book about rare Kakapo parrots in New Zealand and the work of conservationists trying to save the birds from extinction. Extinction—such a dreadful and serious word, and rightly so. But Montgomery and Bishop will inspire hope in children with the side-splittingly funny antics that only nocturnal, flightless, waddling parrots can bring to the seriousness of species conservation. The text is written in an engaging style, filled with Montgomery's usual voice and humor. Bishop's photos provide stunning images, many of which could stand alone as works of art, in spite of their fine job illustrating this important environmental work. Extensive end matter and solid research make this an outstanding book for buddy scientists in upper elementary and middle school.

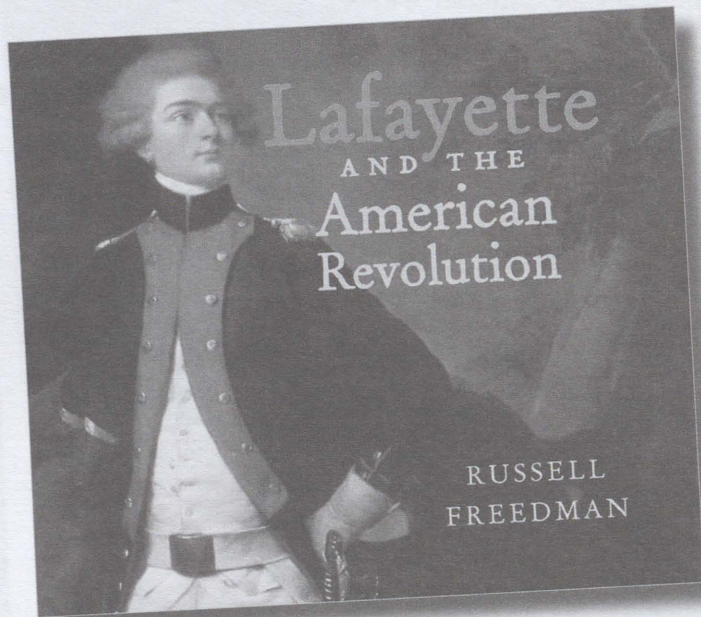
### Honor Books

**Greenberg, J., & Jordan, S.** (2010). *Ballet for Martha: Making Appalachian spring*. (Ill. by B. Floca). New York: Neal Porter/Roaring Brook Press. 48 pp. ISBN: 9781596433380. (Hardcover); \$17.99.

Martha Graham's influence on the world of dance was immeasurable, her choreography impacting the way future generations would draw on modern dance as a new medium and language for movement. Greenberg, Jordan, and Floca have collaborated to create



a book as intricately choreographed as the modern ballet they explore. Rather than simply telling the story behind the ballet, the authors take the reader into the energetic and inspiring creation of the ballet, from first jottings on paper, to score composition, set design, choreography, and costumes. This is a book about the creative process, the magic created when Graham, composer Aaron Copland, and set designer Isamu Noguchi brought their tremendous talents together. The text is accessible for elementary school readers, yet also filled with information, including a lengthy “curtain call.” Floca has won two previous Sibert awards and his watercolor illustrations in *Ballet for Martha* are sublime—presenting the fluidity of the dancers and surprising the reader with interesting visual perspectives.



**Freedman, R.** (2010). *Lafayette and the American Revolution*. New York: Holiday House. 88 pp. ISBN: 9780823421824. (Hardcover); \$24.95.

Extensively researched, this is the story of how a 19-year-old French aristocrat grew weary of courtly life, was inspired by the idea of democratic rule, and became involved in the burgeoning American Revolution. The Marquis de La Fayette became a military officer in the Continental Army and a confidant and friend to General George Washington. Freedman’s writing may not have the voice and style of biographers like Jean Fritz, but he is a good storyteller and a thorough one. Like many of Freedman’s other works, *Lafayette* provides readers with source notes, a bibliography, a timeline, and reproductions of original period paintings for illustrations.

### Laura Ingalls Wilder Award *Tomie dePaola*

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Award is not awarded to an American author or illustrator for one particular book, as are most of the other awards given by the American Library Association; it is given to an author for the body of his or her work, and for making a “substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children” (American Library Association, 2010). Tomie dePaola has written and illustrated more than 200 books for children and his work is beloved by countless children and adults. Often writing stories about his own family or retelling folktales, DePaola’s writing is filled with humor and gentle kindness. His are not books about grand adventures, but about the small moments in every day life that make us smile, laugh, love, and become connected to our families and communities. DePaola’s illustrations are iconic in their simple shapes, soft colors, and artful use of white space. His many awards include a Caldecott Honor for *Strega Nona* (Prentice-Hall, 1975) and a Newbery Honor for *26 Fairmount Avenue* (Putnam, 1999).

### Coretta Scott King Book Awards *Illustrator Award*

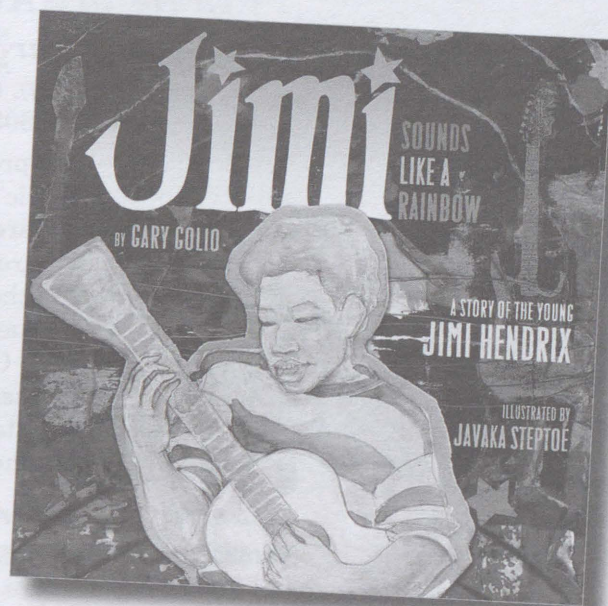
**Hill, L.C.** (2010). *Dave the potter: Artist, poet, slave*. (Ill. by B. Collier). New York: Little, Brown and Company. 40 pp. ISBN: 9780316107310. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

See review under Randolph Caldecott Honor Books.

### **Illustrator Honor**

**Golio, G.** (2010). *Jimi: Sounds like a rainbow: A story of the young Jimi Hendrix.* (Ill. by J. Steptoe). New York: Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 32 pp. ISBN: 9780618852796. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

I first heard about this book while listening to *Weekend Edition* on National Public Radio and hearing an engaging interview with Golio and Steptoe, in which the author described in detail his research process for the book, and the illustrator discussed his approach to illustrating the larger than life world of Jimi Hendrix. (You can listen to the interview and download a transcript at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130727926>.) Golio's lyrical text describes the way Jimi heard music in the sounds all around him as a child, and how there was such music waiting to burst out of him that he made even a one string ukele an instrument of his talent. End matter does include the struggles with drugs that haunted Jimi, but Golio primarily focuses on the artist's creativity and the childhood musical passion that was the font of it. Steptoe's multimedia illustrations are psychedelic and vibrant, almost vibrating with energy. The illustator's note in the end matter provides readers with a fascinating look into the creative process behind the artwork.



### **Author Award**

**Williams-Garcia, R.** (2010). *One crazy summer.* New York: Amistad/HarperCollins.

218 pp. ISBN: 9780060760885. (Hardcover); \$15.99.

Reviewed in The Well-Stocked Bookshelf column.

### **Author Honors**

**Myers, W.D.** (2010). *Lockdown.* New York: Amistad/HarperCollins. 272 pp. ISBN: 9780061214820. (Trade paperback); \$8.99.

**Rhodes, J.P.** (2010). *Ninth ward.* New York: Little, Brown Young Readers. 217 pp. ISBN: 780316043076. (Hardcover); \$15.99.

Reviewed in The Well-Stocked Bookshelf column.

**Neri, G.** (2010). *Yummy: The last days of a southside shorty.* (Ill. by R. DuBurke). New York: Lee & Low Books. 96 pp. ISBN: 9781584302674. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Reviewed in The Well-Stocked Bookshelf column.

### **John Steptoe Award for New Talent**

#### **Illustrator Award**

**Johnson, J.C.** (2010). *Seeds of change: Planting a path to peace.* (Ill. by S.L. Sadler). New York: Lee & Low Books. 40 pp. ISBN: 9781600603679. (Hardcover); \$18.95.

Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to receive a Nobel Peace Prize, is a Kenyan environmentalist and founder of the Green Belt Movement. Johnson presents the story of Maathai's life not just in terms of her many accomplishments as an adult, but also how her childhood prepared her to become the activist she would be as an adult, and the important role that education played in her life. Numerous quotes from Maathai

inspire the reader. Sadler's scratchboard illustrations, evocative of the work of Ashley Bryan and the colored woodblock prints of Baba Wagué Diakité, are ripe with layers of color and a visually exciting interplay of shapes.

**Author Award**

**Bond, V., & Simon, T.R.** (2010). *Zora and me*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press. 192 pp. ISBN: 9780763643003. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

**Pura Belpré Award**

**Illustrator Award**

**Velasquez, E.** (2010). *Grandma's gift*. New York: Walker & Company/Bloomsbury. 40 pp. ISBN: 9780802720825. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

An autobiographical prequel to *Grandma's Records* (Walker, 2001), Velasquez tells the story of young Eric's visit to his grandmother in Spanish Harlem at Christmas time when they prepare for traditional Puerto Rican celebrations. Spanish words and phrases throughout are translated into English. Grandma loves taking Eric on outings, and this time it is to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to be inspired by masterpieces such as Diego Velázquez's portrait of Juan de Pereja. Eric realizes that he, too, could become an artist with Grandma's encouragement and Christmas presents of art supplies. Written and illustrated with Velasquez's typical warmth and introspection, this is a story that speaks to the bonds between generations. Richly colored illustrations spill off the page and help the reader feel the love, pride, and inspiration of the story.

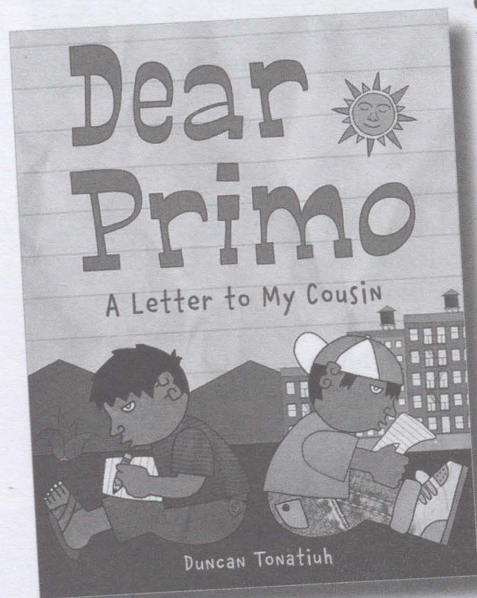
**Illustrator Honors**

**Tonatiuh, D.** (2010). *Dear Primo: A letter to my cousin*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers. 32 pp. ISBN: 9780810938724. (Hardcover); \$15.95.

Charlie and Carlitos are cousins who haven't met, one is growing up in the urban United States and the other on a farm in Mexico. But despite the distance, they form a friendship through letters about their daily lives and discover that even though they are living in different countries, they share a great deal. Both love to play—one in the colorful fall leaves, one in the dry beauty of the desert cacti. Both enjoy their morning ride to school—one on his *bicicleta*, one on the subway that is like a "long metal snake." Both are close with their families. In this, his first children's book, Tonatiuh weaves together two childhoods that are alike at the very core, despite cultural differences. For the artwork, Tanatiuh drew on traditional Mexican art as he created his multimedia collages.

**Tafolla, C.** (2010). *Fiesta babies*. (Ill. by A. Córdova). New York: Tricycle Press/Random House. 24 pp. ISBN: 9781582463193. (Hardcover); \$12.99.

Sure to be a favorite with the preK crowd, the rhythmic, rhyming text and illustrations vibrating with color dovetail perfectly in this charming little book. Renown for her poetry, Carmen Tafolla is able to do that rare thing: make a book for toddlers and preschoolers that is both a hand-clapping delight for young children and fun for the adult reader. Spanish words throughout are explained in a brief glossary at the end, but the support of the beautiful illustrations and the context make a glossary unnecessary. This book is a celebration waiting for all little ones.



**Novesky, A.** (2010). *Me, Frida*. (Ill. by D. Diaz). New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers. 32 pp. ISBN: 9780810989696. (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Frida Kahlo had to find a way to be her own artist, not an easy thing to do when your husband is the world famous painter Diego Rivera. When Frida Diego spend a year in San Francisco so he can paint a mural for the stock exchange, she explores the city, finding inspiration in the sights, sounds, and smells around her. Diaz's multimedia illustrations bring the rich imaginings of Frida to life, with the image of a tiny bird throughout a symbol of her finding her wings as an artist and individual outside of her husband. Luminous is a word sometimes used too liberally in regards to art, but it is the word that best describes Diaz's artwork in this book, the third for which he has been recognized with Pura Belpré laurels.

### **Author Award**

**Muñoz Ryan, P.** (2010). *The dreamer*. (Ill. by P. Sis). New York: Scholastic. 384 pp. ISBN: 9780439269704. (Hardcover); \$17.99.

Reviewed in the Well-Stocked Bookshelf column in the Summer 2010 issue

### **Author Honors**

**Ancona, G.** (2010). *¡Olé! Flamenco*. New York: Lee & Low Books. 47 pp. ISBN: 9781600603617. (Hardcover); \$19.95.

Movement and dance are deeply appealing to children, and Ancona's photo essay about flamenco dancing will be of interest to young dancers. Following the rehearsals and performance of a children's dance troupe in Sante Fe, New Mexico, Ancona makes visible the hard work and energy that go into preparing for a beautiful dance performance in terms of dance, music, and song. End matter includes a glossary and resources.

**Engle, M.** (2010). *The firefly letters: A suffragette's journey to Cuba*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 160 pp. ISBN: 9780805090826. (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Reviewed in The Well-Stocked Bookshelf column in the Spring 2010 issue.

**Flores-Galbis, E.** (2010). *90 miles to Havana*. New York: Roaring Brook Press/Macmillan. 304 pp. ISBN: 9781596431683. (Hardcover); \$17.99.

