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## Children's Books

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*The Eyes of Kid Midas*. Written by Neal Shusterman. Tor Books, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10019. 1994. ISBN: 0-8125-3460-3 (paperback). US\$3.99.

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At the conclusion of this thought provoking novel, the discerning reader will undoubtedly hear the familiar phrase "absolute power corrupts absolutely" echoing from somewhere deep inside. *The Eyes of Kid Midas*, as with many of Shusterman's works, brings the reader face to face with a realistic picture of human nature. When Kevin Midas, the teenage protagonist of the story, discovers a pair of glasses that will grant his every wish the reader is instantly absorbed in the storyline. Who among us has not entertained the fantasy of being granted wishes? Kevin's discovery is veiled in the mystery of an ancient legend related by his teacher on a class camping expedition. This initial setting also allows for the introduction of Kevin's best friend Josh and the principal antagonist, Bertram. Shusterman is to be praised for his handling of the character of Josh. This African-American boy is shown to be resourceful and courageous throughout the events of the story, and the friendship he and Kevin share makes a powerful statement.

It naturally follows that Kevin abuses the power of the glasses. What is unnatural and what makes the story so exceptional is the extent of that abuse. Shusterman boldly forces the reader to a realistic, albeit uncomfortable, look at

what absolute power would surely do. Another striking facet of the storyline lies in the sickness Kevin begins to feel whenever he is not wearing the glasses and using their power. His need to use them becomes a powerful analogy to drug addiction that will be painfully clear to the reader.

In the tightly-woven conclusion both present and past are altered by Kevin's final choice. *The Eyes of Kid Midas* is a masterpiece of young adult fiction which is not only entertaining, but promotes serious thought. Neal Shusterman has used his writing to bring to light some critical issues; teachers may use his book as a vehicle for imparting some of life's greatest lessons.

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*The Nursery Collection*. Written and illustrated by Shirley Hughes. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1994. ISBN: 0-688-13583-5. 54 pp. US\$17.00.

Previously published in 1985 and 1986 as separate small books, the five nursery stories in *The Nursery Collection* by Shirley Hughes explore opposites, the joy of a daily adventure, colors, shapes and sizes, and sound. As with other Shirley Hughes' stories, each is illustrated with casual, colorful examples of family life and carefree children. Written for a pre-school audience, this collection is bound to become a lap-time favorite. (SDC)

## AESOPIA

*The Fables of Aesop.* Retold by Frances Barnes-Murphy; illustrated by Rowan Barnes-Murphy. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1994. ISBN: 0-688-07051-5. 96 pp. US\$19.95.

Frances Barnes-Murphy and Rowan Barnes-Murphy have collaborated with Aesop, perhaps the world's most famous storyteller, to create a surpassingly entertaining collection of more than a hundred of his fables. Space is used elegantly and with great variety, so that some facing pages present a single fable illustrated by a full-color painting, while other paired pages contain as many as four fables, with pen-and-ink animals leaping and prancing around them. In a departure from the typical format for the fables, the stories stand alone, without concluding one-line homilies, which, according to an introductory "Collector's Note," probably were added during the middle ages. This is a wholly enchanting book for readers and those being read to, of all ages. One can envision Aesop himself, stirring from centuries-long sleep to settle comfortably on a cloud, turning these pages and chuckling with delight. (JMJ)

## Bird-watching

*Backyard Birds of Winter.* Written by Carol Lerner. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1994. ISBN: 0-688-12819. 48 pp. US\$16.00.

Carol Lerner's learning and artistry are once again shared in this handsome book showing birds which can be seen — especially by families with backyard bird feeders — during the winter months. (Lerner's earlier books, *A Forest Year* and *A Desert Year* are award-winning science tradebooks familiar to many young readers. Birds are shown in full color, drawn to 3/4 scale (except for the largest birds, whose

length is given beside their pictures), with small inset maps of the United States and Canada showing the areas which are each bird's winter habitat. The book includes a final section on bird food and bird feeders, a page of suggestions for further reading on bird identification and bird feeding, and a detailed Index. This is a handsome giftbook for all the family to learn from and enjoy. (JMJ)

### **Rejoicing in Diversity**

*All the Colors of the Earth.* Written by Sheila Hamanaka. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1994. ISBN: 0-688-11131-9. 32 pp. US\$15.00.

Appropriately, every page of this beautiful book is in full color, and the text ripples joyously through the paintings of children at play, children embracing, children asleep. "Children come in all the colors of love, in endless shades of you and me." A wonderful book to go to sleep by, dream about, and wake up to hear and see again. (JMJ)

### **Pullet Surprise Winner!**

*Otter Nonsense.* Written by Norton Juster. Illustrated by Michael Witte. Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1994. ISBN: 0-688-12282-5. Unpaginated. US\$9.95.

Everyone will find a favorite illustration and punning phrase - such as the terrified inner-tubed porpoise about to be submerged by a brightly suited ox doing a cannonball from the diving board ("Oxidentially on porpoise"). But each favorite will be transient, because new jollies appear with each turned page. (Try imagining "an aardvark and an even aarder vark taking a vark.") Norton Juster has been justly famous as a punster ever since the publication of *The Phantom Tollbooth*. This pocketsize treasury, here to cheer us all up, is a popular choice. (JMJ)