

10-1-1992

Children's Books

Mary Radtke
Western Michigan University

Sherry R. Myers
Kalamazoo Public Schools, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Jeanne M. Jacobson
Western Michigan University

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Recommended Citation

Radtke, M., Myers, S. R., & Jacobson, J. M. (1992). Children's Books. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 33 (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol33/iss1/11

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Children's Books

Two for classroom or lap-time

Reviewed by Mary Radtke
Western Michigan University

Barnaby and the Big Gorilla. Written and illustrated by Alain Leonard. Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1992. ISBN: 0-688-11291-9. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Barnaby, a darling young rabbit, is tormented by his fear of the stuffed gorilla at his uncle's house. It is huge and furry and has BIG teeth. Barnaby won't go anywhere near the gorilla until the day he makes the decision to save his treasured horse, who rolls between the gorilla's paws. Barnaby speaks to the gorilla, tries a very clever trick and pushes the gorilla with a stick — but is still unsuccessful. It is only after Barnaby marches bravely up to the gorilla that he is able to save his friend horse, and also to conquer his fear of the big gorilla. The author nicely captures the perspective of a young child's fear, treating Barnaby with gentle respect and leaving the reader celebrating Barnaby's eventual success. The text is especially well formatted to be shared with beginning readers. Alain Leonard limits each page to single or double lines of text, consistently located at the bottom of the page. This feature allows the young reader to develop directionality, a critical early strategy. Illustrations are clear, expressive and consistent in size and placement.

Island Baby. Written and illustrated by Holly Keller. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. 1991. ISBN: 0-688-10579-3. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Island Baby is a jewel — another Holly Keller creation that should top the wish list of every picture book collector. Young Simon lives for the time he spends each morning with Pops, helping at the island bird hospital. It is always bittersweet when Simon's patients are returned to health and no longer need him, but he takes a special interest in Baby, the flamingo he rescues from the sea. Simon bandages Baby's broken leg and takes sole responsibility for daily feedings, exercise and care. As summer closes, and Baby regains strength, it is moving for the reader to share in the moment when Simon and the

flamingo both confront independence. The intergenerational relationship between Pops and Simon is sweet. They share a sense of devotion to the island birds and to each other. *Island Baby* paints a beautiful picture of a developing work ethic as well as a selfless sharing of time, energy and — most of all — compassion in a world that is all too often cold. Language in this text is rich; concepts are well-developed. The story is appropriate for classroom reading or an intimate lap-time at home.

Reissue of a classic

Through the Magic Mirror. Written by Anthony Browne. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-10725-7. 1992. 32 pp. US\$14.00.

Reviewed by Sherry R. Myers
Kalamazoo Public Schools

The reissuing of Anthony Browne's *Through the Magic Mirror*, first published in 1977, is a happy occurrence. In the story, Toby is bored with everything... until he discovers he can step through his mirror. He finds himself outside, but it's not the outside he remembers. Dogs walk people, mice chase cats, painters paint the sky, choirboys fly, people dress outlandishly or they are invisible. Just as he is being chased by the zoo animals that are escaping from a poster, he finds the mirror, climbs back through, and hurries downstairs for tea. The story is simply told, but marvelously and intriguingly illustrated. Depending upon the view of child and adult, it can either be used to foster and validate a child's wonderful imagination, or to explore the absurdities we see around us in the real world every day — if we were to really open our eyes and minds. On a more simplistic level, the child can play "what is wrong here?" with each of the illustrations, but I must warn you that "what is wrong" is sometimes not so simple. A case in point is the cover illustration, where Toby is looking in a full-length mirror. What we see reflected is Toby's back, which at first glance seems normal and only with thought becomes absurd.

Classroom use of the book might include a chance for children to draw or to tell of the world they see through the mirror or to look for things in their surroundings that are really there

and yet are almost as amazing as tulip street lights. Children "go through the mirror" quite naturally and delightedly and will joyfully explore Toby's world. Adults sharing the book with children may recapture the spirit of adventure with which children see the bizarre in the mundane. For all, a trip *Through the Magic Mirror* is a chance to turn their minds upside-down and let the sand run the other direction, a chance to experience and grow from Browne's creativity.

Poetry Choices

Barbara Fretchie. Written by John Greenleaf Whittier. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-09829-0. 32 pp. 1992. US\$14.00.

The Keys to My Kingdom: A Poem in Three Languages. Written and illustrated by Lydia Dabovich. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. ISBN: 0-688-09774-X. 28 pp. 1992. US\$14.00.

In 1863, as the Civil War raged, poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier published a poem in the *Atlantic Monthly*, celebrating the heroism of one frail person daring to stand against armed troops. His protagonist was Barbara Fretchie —

*"Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag," she said.*

— whom he pictured as the only person in Fredericktown (Frederick, Maryland) brave enough to display the American flag while Confederate troops marched through. In Whittier's poem the leader of the rebels was a gallant general who had recently died — Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, to whom he also gave a speech which is well-remembered:

*"Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!" he said.*

Whittier wrote the poem after hearing word of mouth accounts of the event, and though it illuminates history, the events described are not historically accurate. Nancy Winslow Parker's gentle, quasi-realistic illustrations match well with these ambiguities. She concludes the book with an illustration of the Civil War campaign medal, engraved with Lincoln's famous phrase, "With malice toward none, with charity for all," biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Whittier, and a page of military and historical notes. Inside covers and facing pages show eight

historical Union and Confederate flags. The handsome, well-balanced book is an excellent presentation of an illuminating historical vignette. Reading it can lead children (and adults) to further study of this period in US history.

In *The Keys to my Kingdom* Lydia Dabovich has chosen an elaborate, rhythmically repetitive nursery rhyme to present, line by line, in English, French and Spanish translations. Odd numbered pages are fully devoted to colorful, detailed illustrations; the facing pages contain a section from the illustration followed by a line of the rhyme in English (blue), French (purple), and Spanish (green):

In that kingdom there is a city;
Dans ce royaume il y a une ville;
En ese reino hay una ciudad;

Because each line of the rhyme builds on what has gone before, learning the words and phrases is made delightfully easy. Wonderful for multilingual classrooms, or for opening the world of languages to anyone, anywhere! (JMJ)

Quiet Loveliness

This Quiet Lady, written by Charlotte Zolotow. Greenwillow Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10017. ISBN: 0-688-09305-1. 1992. 20 pp. US\$14.00.

Once again Anita Lobel has collaborated with a celebrated author of children's literature to produce a modern classic rich in the beauty of words and ideas. Zolotow's text produces the voice of an unseen narrator describing photographs: *This baby smiling in her bassinette under the crocheted throw is my mother.* Lobel's illustrations do more than photographs could to make the family pictures ones with which all families can identify. In small illustrations we see a child pointing to a series of family photographs, which are then shown in bold color on the facing pages. Through them we trace the stages of a woman's life: *This untidy schoolgirl with her wrinkled stockings is my mother...* *This quiet lady, lovely and large, standing on our front porch is my mother.* Then finally: *And here is where I begin.* The last page of this beautiful, celebratory book is not the traditional "the end." The picture shows another baby; the text is *The Beginning.* (JMJ)