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## REVIEWS: Professional Materials

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# REVIEWS

## Professional Materials

***Basic Reading Inventory*** by Jerry L. Johns.

Kendall-Hunt Publishing, 2460 Kerper Blvd., Dubuque IA 52004-0539. 1991  
ISBN 0-8403-6279-X. 284 pp. US\$24.00

Reviewed by Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch  
Western Michigan University

While the field of reading assessment reflects the changes which are occurring throughout education today, the Informal Reading Inventory continues to be widely used by, among others, regular and special education teachers, reading specialists, and school psychologists. The text *Basic Reading Inventory* by Jerry L. Johns is representative of those instruments which can provide the professional with a great deal of useful data about a reader in a relatively short period of time.

The fifth edition of the *Basic Reading Inventory* is patterned after the IRI (Informal Reading Inventory) format which includes sets of graded word lists, a series of graded paragraphs, and comprehension questions. According to the author, the purposes of the inventory are to determine the student's 1) reading levels (independent, instructional, frustration and listening); 2) strategies for word identification; and 3) strengths and weaknesses in comprehension.

Additional features enhance the value of this inventory. The author has included a brief section on background information relevant to each section of the text. This background includes history and development of the IRI and suggestions for instructional strategies to support learners in becoming strategic readers. The fifth edition also includes a section in scoring according to significant miscue analysis. The passages in the

*Basic Reading Inventory* have been lengthened, but the professional must determine whether or not their purpose of assessment is served through an administration of an informal reading inventory. If that can be determined, then the *Basic Reading Inventory* contains many positive features which would make it a viable choice.

## Children's Books

***Merry Christmas, Amanda and April*** by Bonnie Pryor.

Illustrated by Diane de Groat.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

1991. ISBN 0-688-07544-4. 32 pp. US\$13.95.

Reviewed by Sherry R. Myers  
Western Michigan University

Sisters Amanda and April are sent by their mother to get ingredients to make cookies for Santa's snack. On the way they stop to sled-ride and do a good deed. When they get to the store, the grocery list is missing and they must try to remember what their mother wanted, ending up with both flour and flowers. The piglet sisters leave both cookies and a bouquet for Santa, and in return, receive the presents they had hoped for.

*Merry Christmas, Amanda and April* is a gentle story, only minimally about Christmas; it's really a good tale for all winter long. The illustrations are colorful and entertaining, and the story is appealing in its knowledge of listener reaction to its plot. The idea that flowers could be as important to Santa as the flour in his cookies is pleasing, as is the feature that the person helped in the story is an adult, not another child. The story subtly reminds children that adults can truly need their help, that they can contribute something to an adult's life, instead of the other way around. Most appealing about the story, though, is its characterization of the sisters who are neither too loving, as was true in books of an earlier generation, nor too hateful, as seems to be true of many current books. It has just the appropriate mix of not getting along and getting along, concern and unconcern. It is the relationship between April and Amanda that will captivate the reader, young and old alike.

***Chicken Man* by Michelle Edwards.**

Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.  
1991. ISBN 0-688-09708-1. 32 pp.

Reviewed by Paul Bright  
Western Michigan University

The summer that *Chicken Man* works in the kibbutz chicken coop, the hens lay more than ever before. But as is the custom on an Israeli kibbutz (a self-supporting farm), *Chicken Man* is moved to another job, and then another – until the hens stop laying eggs. *Oy va voy!* From the brightly colored illustrations to the charming Yiddish expressions, this book is a delight. The illustrations contain two notable features. At the very beginning of the book is a simple map of the kibbutz where *Chicken Man* lives and works, giving the reader a sense of what a kibbutz is like. Second, the book unexpressedly invites the reader to interact by searching for *Chicken Man*'s red hat on each page that he is pictured.

One could say that *Chicken Man* is an Israeli version of "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" for while *Chicken Man* is always happy in whatever job he does, his fellow Kibbutzniks are envious and think that he must have the best job on the kibbutz. The reader might chuckle at *Chicken Man*'s seemingly optimistic view of work; however, his simple character also exemplifies a good work ethic. This book quietly states that we should make the most out of our present circumstances and not waste our time wishing for a better tomorrow. Finally, with the recent focus of the world on the Middle East, and education's multicultural thrust, this culturally-rich book has much to offer both library and private collections.

***All the Lights in the Night* by Arthur A. Levine.**

Illustrated by James E. Ransome.

Tambourine Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019.  
1991. ISBN 0-688-10107-0. 30 pp. US\$14.95.

This beautiful Hanukkah story, recounting events in the life of the author's grandfather and great uncle, reminds us of the bravery of families who stand united even when separated

by distance and by the cruelty of oppressors. The year is 1914. Of three boys in a Russian family, the oldest, David, has been able to emigrate to Palestine. Persecution of Russian Jews is increasing; David has sent his parents money — enough for two more family members to escape. The parents will remain; young Moses and Benjamin will travel together from their tiny village, hidden in the cart of a friendly neighbor, to Minsk, then by train to Warsaw, finally by ship to Palestine. Their mother has sent with them a Hanukkah lamp; echoing the miracle which Hanukkah celebrates, they have only oil enough to light the lamp once. Though the oil is indeed consumed, the lamp enables the boys to stay together; the miracle we see is one of human love, ingenuity and endurance. The story's conclusion is joyous: in place of the lamp, the boys have all the lights in the night sky. *Softly Moses began to sing the Hanukkah prayer and Benjamin joined in. And their voices took to the air like seabirds, their bright music carrying over the wind.* (JMJ)

### Classics Retold

***Jack and the Beanstalk*** by Steven Kellogg.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

1991. ISBN 0-688-10250-6. 48 pp. US\$14.95.

***The Swineherd*** by Hans Christian Andersen.

Illustrated by Deborah Hahn.

Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books. 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

1991. ISBN 0-688-10052-X. 32 pp. US\$14.95.

Gorgeous, glorious illustrations sweep across the pages of Steven Kellogg's brilliant version of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, beginning with a frontispiece explaining the source of the ogre's ill-gotten riches. Partly concealed in the skin of a creature with terrifying tusks and claws, the horrible ogre is swooping down on a pirate ship, where the wicked crew, now begging for mercy, have been counting their booty: bags of gold, a squawking hen with two golden eggs beside her, and a magical harp whose resident singers are wailing frantically. The end pages present a marvelously happy ending, in which a carriage whose passengers include the joyous harp, a jewel-bedecked hen clutched by Jack's still-amazed mother, a mastiff and four cheery cats, draws Jack and his princess bride, and their three royal children, to a distant castle, while a benign

wizard, standing with his equally happy cow, waves in greeting. Between these two elegant additions to the story are a treasurehouse of other illustrations, with gently witty text.

Deborah Hahn gives credit not only to the author of the story she has chosen to illustrate, but to her own ingenious creations: *The Swineherd*, by Hans Christian Andersen, Narrated by Himself and Acted by His Favorite Friends and Relations. Two concurrent stories are presented. The printed text tells Andersen's story of a prince who becomes a swineherd out of love for a silly princess, who loves possessions too much, and, in the end, is desolate and deserted. Above this text, Andersen himself, and a lovable cast of children and animals, keep up a running dialogue as they act out the story. And then Andersen asks his little audience for their opinion of his ending, and they give it: *unjust, unbearable, such sadness, fierce, unforgivable, cruel, he couldn't have meant it, heartless...* and they decide to make a change: *with all due respect Hans, we'll give it a new ending.* The "truly happy ending" is a joy; Andersen's bleak conclusion is lightly but firmly transformed. (JMJ)

## Two by James Stevenson

### *The Worst Person's Christmas*

1991. ISBN 0-688-10210-7. 32 pp. US\$13.95.

### *That's Exactly the Way It Wasn't*

1991. ISBN 0-688-09868-1. 32 pp. US\$13.95

Both from Greenwillow Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

In *The Worst Person's Christmas*, grumpy Mr. Worst reappears (earlier tales: *The Worst Person in the World; The Worst Person in the World at Crab Beach*), taking a characteristically Scrooge-like view of neighborhood festivities. He is foiled, though not reformed, by a gift, — "*How about a fruitcake?*" said Jenny. "*He is a fruitcake,*" said Walker. "*Perfect,*" said Jenny. — a piece of ice, a sled, and a fortuitously placed party. Using a cartoon format, *That's Exactly the Way It Wasn't* takes the theme of family arguments to hilarious lengths: "*Must be getting late, Wainey.*" "*Early.*" "*Steep hill, Wainey.*" "*Flat. Nice view, Wainey!*" "*Icky.*" RRRRUMBLE "*Does that sound like a landslide, Wainey?*" "*Nump.*" and heights and depths: "*Well, I guess you'll have to agree, Wainey, that we're falling...*" THUD! "*Nump... not any more!*" Present day spats among siblings are

tame compared to Grandpa's argument with Uncle Wayne about a long-ago adventure featuring a protective purple armadillo, a yawning green iguana, assorted chatty birds, and an eventual landing on something hot and bubbly and about to erupt. (Given the author's lush imagination, we can conclude it won't be a volcano.) Ethical, humorous and inventive, Stevenson's books are perennial favorites for all ages. (JMJ)

**The World of Work**  
***An Auto Mechanic; A Carpenter; A Potter***  
 by Douglas Florian

Greenwillow Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016. 1991.  
 ISBN 0-688-10635-8, 0-688-09760-X, 0-688-101003-3, respectively.

Each 24 pp., and US\$13.95.

Douglas Florian's books celebrate workers: a potter, a carpenter, an auto mechanic. The workers are diverse in gender and age, but have one characteristic in common: all have red hair. Warm colors predominate in the big, bright illustrations. The print is also large, and the brief text is chunked into phrases, making the books good choices for early reading; occasional rhymed sections contribute to reading ease. Florian treats young readers with respect; the descriptions of different kinds of work are informative, sound and straightforward. (JMJ)

***Meredith's Mother Takes the Train***

by Deborah Lee Rose. Illustrated by Irene Trivas.

Albert Whitman and Company, 5747 West Howard Street, Niles IL 60648-4012. 1991. ISBN 0-8075-5061-2. US\$10.95.

*Meredith's Mother Takes the Train*, dedicated by the author "to my mother, who took the train," is a clever, briskly-rhymed account of a busy child and her busier mother, spending their weekdays, respectively, at a well-run daycare center and an active office. The happy conclusion to the week is a Saturday spent together at the zoo. The book is a welcome celebration of hard work, and the joys experienced by career women and their children. (JMJ)

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