

Reading Journal

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- Title:** *An Edward Lear Alphabet*
- Author:** Edward Lear; “made up and colored by Vladimir Radunsky”
- Genre:** Picture book: Alphabet
- Audience:** 4-6 years
- Annotation:** Colorful, modern illustrations prove that Edward Lear’s alphabet poems are as fresh and modern now as when they were first published in 1871.

Review:

One wouldn’t expect alphabet poems that are over 130 years old to be interesting and exciting today, but Edward Lear’s alphabet book has stood the test of time. With Vladimir Radunsky’s bright and vibrant illustrations, peppered with cartoonish depictions of Edward Lear himself, most of Lear’s verses could have been written last year.

All the letters up to N are just as applicable today as in the nineteenth century, but it is likely that most children will not know some of the words chosen for less-common letters, for example “quail” and “yew.” Another word, “pump,” is illustrated by Radunsky as a style of women’s shoe, whereas the original was almost surely a water pump. Radunsky’s interpretation is not necessarily wrong, but it’s interesting to consider how words and associations change over time, even in as “simple” a book.

Comparison:

Most of the reviews I read of Radunsky’s alphabet book, including the *Publishers Weekly* review, focus on the timelessness of Lear’s nonsense poetry and on the vibrant color of Radunsky’s illustrations. Not unsurprisingly, *Publishers Weekly* is unequivocally positive about the picture book, but *School Library Journal* features a more critical review by Betty Teague.

My opinions have more in common with Teague, who mentions the positive aspects of timelessness and color but gives prominence to the wording on the cover and title page: “made up and colored by Vladimir Radunsky,” which is confusing to children and adults alike. She also notes that Radunsky “takes liberties with Lear’s punctuation,” even though the wording is true to the original. She concludes that the volume is “a delight for any alphabet book collection in spite of the potential confusion about the credits.”

Rev. of *An Edward Lear Alphabet*, by Vladimir Radunsky. *Publishers Weekly* April 26, 1999: 81.

Teague, Betty. Rev. of *An Edward Lear Alphabet*, by Vladimir Radunsky. *School Library Journal* 45.6 (1999): 118.

Title: *My Very First Look at Shapes*

Author: Christiane Gunzi

Genre: Picture book: Concept

Audience: 3-4 years

Annotation: Colorful pictures of objects familiar to young children illustrate the concept of shapes: circles, triangles, squares, and even more complex shapes like hearts and spirals.

Review:

Overall, I like this book. The illustrations are bright and colorful. Many of them are things that a child would know (cookies, a sandwich, a bagel), but others are less common (a mango, spiral pasta) or confusing (a fan-shaped, decorated cookie, a shoe box with shoes in it, strips of clay laid together to make a rectangle). In addition, most of the “triangles” are actually wedges rather than true triangles, which I find very misleading. The book doesn’t need to treat wedges as another shape, but it shouldn’t tell children that wedges are triangles.

Despite the title, it’s definitely not a book geared towards a child’s first introduction to shapes. A child who doesn’t know what a circle is yet probably doesn’t have the capacity to pick out the shapes in many of the pictures or to understand that many of the pictured objects are only coincidentally in the shapes that we see here (spiral pasta, buttons, a diamond-shaped box, clay). On the other hand, given the age range, the book is obviously meant to be read with an adult who can clarify any confusion and use the questions at the bottom of each page to encourage the child to connect the pictures with what s/he knows of the world.

My Very First Look at Shapes connects conceptual shapes with real objects with which children are familiar, but I would not recommend it as a first book about shapes.

Comparison:

My Very First Look at Shapes is one of four “My Very First Look at…” books authored by Christiane Gunzi, and both reviews covered multiple books: colors, shapes, numbers, and sizes. Phelan covers all four books in one short review and never mentions *Shapes* explicitly, but some of her comments about *Colors* are applicable: “Most objects, such as grapes and boots, are readily identifiable, while others, such as shrimp (looking rather orange on the ‘pink’ page) and crystal, will stump most preschoolers.” It would have been nice if Phelan said something specific about *Shapes*, but her covering them all in the same review indicates that they are all essentially comparable.

Krapp covers *Shapes* and *Colors* in one review and is much less neutral, stating flatly that Gunzi’s books are “mediocre entries in the growing field of concept books” and recommending two shape books and two color books in preference to Gunzi’s. Like Phelan, her criticisms center on the fact that images or questions may be confusing to preschoolers.

I found Krapp’s review much more helpful than Phelan’s because she devoted more explicit comments to *Shapes*, her age range was more specific (“preschool” in contrast to Phelan’s “1-5”), and above all, she provided recommendations for better books on the same topic.

- Krapp, Lisa Gangemi. Rev. of *My Very First Look at Shapes*, by Christiane Gunzi. *School Library Journal* 48.2 (2002): 120.
- Phelan, Carolyn. Rev. of *My Very First Look at Shapes*, by Christiane Gunzi. *Booklist* 98 (2002): 1017.

Title: *Four Hungry Kittens*
Author: Emily Arnold McCully
Genre: Picture book: Wordless
Audience: 4-6 years

Annotation: Emily Arnold McCully's evocative watercolor illustrations tell the story of four lively kittens who explore their barnyard home while their mother is away hunting for food.

Review:

In just twenty-nine watercolor illustrations, with no words at all, McCully's four hungry and curious kittens explore the world of the barnyard with curiosity and enthusiasm, examining even the dog's bone with full, if momentary, concentration. Their quest for food is fruitless (eventually the kittens' mother comes back with a mouse she has killed), but during her absence, the kittens learn a valuable lesson of their own. The farmer's dog, initially very large and scary to the kittens, wins their trust by saving both the kittens and their mother from the mishaps that befell them.

As one would expect, the story's end is heartwarming, but the book is also filled with humor, mostly at the kittens' antics.

Comparison:

Both reviews that I read were very similar, featuring a brief summary of the plot and attempting to evoke McCully's heartwarming and beautiful illustrations in mere words. No doubt they find it as hard as I do to convey how much they love this soft and gentle book.

However, while Lukehart sees no downside to the book, Cooper cautions that some children may be disturbed or want to know what happens to the mouse that the mother cat brings back to her kittens at the end of the book.

Cooper, Ilene. Rev. of *Four Hungry Kittens*, by Emily Arnold McCully. *Booklist* 97 (2001): 967-968.

Lukehart, Wendy. Rev. of *Four Hungry Kittens*, by Emily Arnold McCully. *School Library Journal* 47.3 (2001): 214.

Booktalk:

Emily Arnold McCully's *Four Hungry Kittens* is a wordless book, and although it has a plot, it's not about plot. It's about characters, four barn kittens and the farm dog, and their explorative forays into friendship. I'm going to show you my favorite scene, hoping that everyone can get a good-enough glimpse, and let you all discover the story on your own.

Title: *Jane Yolen's Mother Goose Songbook*

Author: Jane Yolen

Genre: Picture book: Mother Goose

Audience: 3 years and up

Annotation: Well-known children's author Jane Yolen sets familiar nursery rhymes in their historical and social context, while her son Adam Stemple sets them to music and Rosekrans Hoffman's colorful illustrations bring them to life.

Review:

Everyone knows that "Ring around a rosy" is about the bubonic plague, but did you know that "Goosey, Goosey, Gander" is about the murder of a cardinal or that "Hey, Diddle, Diddle" might have originated with Queen Elizabeth I dancing at court? I didn't, until I read *Jane Yolen's Mother Goose Songbook*. Every song is accompanied by a short paragraph or two about the historical origins and social context of the song. Yolen's songbook would be excellent even if it were simply a well-illustrated collection of singable rhymes, but the background on each rhyme makes them all much more meaningful and enjoyable. Even though younger children will not understand the historical context, they can still enjoy the word play. The history will also make the rhymes more interesting for older children.

Comparison:

The difference between the *Horn Book* review and the one in *Publishers Weekly* is stunning, because of their respective intended audiences. *Publishers Weekly* dedicates approximately half of its one-paragraph article to the "slightly skewed perspectives, vivid and playful borders, [and] fanciful details" of Rosekrans Hoffman's illustrations. In contrast, Zeiger spends most of her article on the historical details (thrilling to librarians!) included in Yolen's *Songbook*. Personally, I care more about the facts than the pretty pictures, but it doesn't really matter because we all came to the same conclusion: *Jane Yolen's Mother Goose Songbook* is a "perfect way for adults to share the gift of Mother Goose songs with the very young."

Rev. of *Jane Yolen's Mother Goose Songbook*, by Jane Yolen. *Publishers Weekly* October 5, 1992: 72.

Zeiger, Hanna B. Rev. of *Jane Yolen's Mother Goose Songbook*, by Jane Yolen. *Horn Book* 69 (1993): 216.

Title: *Babushka's Mother Goose*

Author: Patricia Polacco

Genre: Picture book: Mother Goose

Audience: 3-6 years

Annotation: Well-known children's author Patricia Polacco infuses a Russian flair into her collection of Mother Goose-style verses and stories.

Review:

This is not a Mother Goose book like any other. Rather than copying classic Mother Goose rhymes, Polacco emulates her own "Babushka" by writing her own verses and stories as well as printing many of those that she remembers from her own childhood. Many of her rhymes are inspired by Mother Goose, by Aesop's fables, and by other folk tales, but she reshapes them with a Russian flair, using names like "Uri" or "Svetlana" and referring several times to the Czar. Polacco's illustrations also evoke an Eastern European flair, with farm animals and women wearing colorful skirts and head scarves. Polacco has captured the essential nature of Mother Goose nonsense rhymes and skillfully translated it into a different culture, partially circumventing the Anglocentric nature of Mother Goose.

Comparison:

All the reviews that I read on this book are almost identical. All of them mention the fact that many of the tales and rhymes belong to her babushka, and all of them praise the bright and whimsical illustrations. Lempke and the *Publishers Weekly* article mention the fact that because not all the stories and rhymes were written by Polacco or even intended for publication, they are a fairly "mixed bag" that nevertheless contains some treasures. All reviews conclude favorably.

Lempke, Susan Dove. Rev. of *Babushka's Mother Goose*, by Patricia Polacco. *Booklist* 92 (1995): 407-408.

Rev. of *Babushka's Mother Goose*, by Patricia Polacco. *Publishers Weekly* September 18, 1995: 131.

Zeiger, Hanna B. Rev. of *Babushka's Mother Goose*, by Patricia Polacco. *Horn Book* 72 (1996): 218.

Title: *Good Night, Garden Gnome*

Author: Jamichael Henterly

Genre: Picture book: Fantasy

Audience: 4-7 years

Annotation: A humble garden gnome patiently endures the attentions of a young girl until he comes to life at nightfall.

Review:

I fell in love with the full-page, full-color illustrations of *Good Night, Garden Gnome*. They are gorgeous and life-like, and they tell a simple but heart-warming story. A young girl, out in the garden with a wagon full of dolls and stuffed animals, picks up a garden gnome and includes him in her tea parties and dresses him up, like girls do. He endures her attentions patiently and stoically until nightfall, when she departs and he comes to life. During the night he weeds and waters the vegetables, keeps the slugs and rabbits away from the lettuce, and protects mice, squirrels, and chipmunks from a prowling cat. Finally, he finds a teddy bear accidentally left behind by the child and braves the danger of a dog who buries both the gnome and the bear, in order to return it to the child, who finds it on her windowsill in the morning.

Comparison:

Both reviews are very similar, containing a plot summary which takes up at least half of the article and evoking the fantastic feeling of the illustrations. However, Owen focuses more on the paradise-like, “lush, bountiful garden,” whereas the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer feels the mood more as “spooky” because of the gnome’s “vacant stare.” Overall, both reviewers liked this “gentle salute to the imagination.”

Owen, Maryann H. Rev. of *Good Night, Garden Gnome*, by Jamichael Henterly. *School Library Journal* 47.3 (2001): 209.

Rev. of *Good Night, Garden Gnome*, by Jamichael Henterly. *Kirkus Reviews* January 1, 2001: 53.

Title: *A Houseful of Christmas*

Author: Barbara Joosse; illustrated by Betsy Lewin

Genre: Picture book: Realistic

Audience: 3-6 years

Annotation: Joosse's onomatopoeic text and Lewin's charming line and watercolor illustrations bring a family Christmas to life.

Review:

A Houseful of Christmas doesn't have an exciting plot, but its illustrations are charming, and the story is comforting: a loving extended family comes for Christmas at Grandma's and makes the best of spending the night when an evening snowstorm traps them there. The text is full of lulling sounds like "shh shh shh" and "tick tick tick," making it both rhythmic and soothing. A perfect holiday bedtime story.

Comparison:

Both reviews contain a plot summary and then a short conclusion. The only difference between them is that the *School Library Journal* review mentions that *A Houseful of Christmas* would make an excellent read-aloud, either one-on-one or in a group.

Cooper, Ilene. Rev. of *A Houseful of Christmas*, by Barbara Joosse. *Booklist* 98 (2001): 326.

S.P. Rev. of *A Houseful of Christmas*, by Barbara Joosse. *School Library Journal* 47.10 (2001): 66.

- Title:** *Always Room for One More*
- Author:** Sorche Nic Leodhas; illustrated by Nonny Hogrogian
- Genre:** Picture book: Rhyming
- Audience:** 4-8 years
- Annotation:** A retelling of a Scottish folk song about Lachie McLachlan, for whom there is “always room for one more” guest in the house.

Review:

In *Always Room for One More*, Lachie McLachlan has a wife and ten children in a one-room house but nevertheless invites in every traveler who passes by, insisting that there is “always room for one more.” The fiddler starts playing, and everyone starts dancing and singing, and eventually there are so many rollicking people in the house that it falls down! In return for Lachie’s hospitality, everyone joins in and builds a new, bigger house for the McLachlans. It’s a pleasantly non-didactic demonstration of hospitality and people simply helping each other out. Hatched and cross-hatched pen-and-ink drawings give the illustrations an interesting texture, and the ground is colored in heathery purple and green. At the end of the book, Nic Leodhas includes a glossary of Scottish words and the basic musical tune.

Comparison:

I cannot find any significant differences between the two reviews. Both call *Always Room for One More* a traditional Scottish folk song, both describe the illustrations, and both list the glossary and tune. The only difference is that the *Horn Book* review is long and poetically descriptive, compared to Alger’s terse and prosaic style.

Alger, Leclair. Rev. of *Always Room for One More*, by Sorche Nic Leodhas. *Booklist* 62 (1965): 270.

E.L.H. Rev. of *Always Room for One More*, by Sorche Nic Leodhas. *Horn Book* 41 (1965): 622.

Title: *My Friend Rabbit*

Author: Eric Rohmann

Genre: Picture book: Caldecott

Audience: 3-6 years

Annotation: Mouse narrates a short story about his dear friend who “means well” but who is always getting into one scrape or another.

Review:

I am not at all surprised that *My Friend Rabbit* got a Caldecott. Even though I know that the Caldecott is for illustrations, I cannot help but be more moved by the story than by the pictures in this short but incredible sweet book. Rabbit is exactly like myself in many respects, well-meaning and creative but clumsy and a bit over-eager as well. The love and friendship that Rabbit and Mouse bear for each other is evident in every look that they give each other, in the lengths to which Rabbit goes in order to retrieve Mouse’s airplane, and in the patience with which Mouse awaits the disastrous conclusion of Rabbit’s latest “idea.” It is infinitely comforting to me to know that Mouse still loves Rabbit, warts and all.

That story’s action, on the other hand, is carried mostly by Rohmann’s wonderfully colorful and evocative illustrations. They are bright, round, and warm but at the same time almost cartoon-like in their bold lines and ever-present motion lines. I have the sense that Rabbit and Mouse are always moving, never still.

My Friend Rabbit is a story of true friendship for children of all ages.

Comparison:

Surprisingly, in this batch of reviews, I found the anonymous *Kirkus Reviews* article to be less well-written and informing than that of either Fletcher or de Lacoste. It talks about many of the same aspects as the others, but its writing style is more formal, more academic, less descriptive, and less engaging. *Kirkus Reviews* devotes a mere sentence to the sequencing of pictures: “Rohmann uses wordless, and sometimes even empty, frames to great comic effect ... and artfully [captures] the expressions on [the animals’] faces,” but Fletcher devotes more than half of her review to that topic, describing the humorous scenes and concluding, “Tremendous physical humor delivers a gentle lesson about accepting friends as they are.”

Fletcher, Connie. Rev. of *My Friend Rabbit*, by Eric Rohmann. *Booklist* 98 (2002): 1602-1603.

De Lacoste, Kristin. Rev. of *My Friend Rabbit*, by Eric Rohmann. *School Library Journal* 48.5 (2002): 126.

Rev. of *My Friend Rabbit*, by Eric Rohmann. *Kirkus Reviews* April 15, 2002: 577.

Title: *Golem*
Author: David Wisniewski
Genre: Picture book: Caldecott
Audience: 5-9 years
Annotation: A rabbi in 16th-century Prague creates a golem in order to protect Prague's Jews from persecution, but he does not realize that what is created must also be destroyed.

Review:

In my opinion, Wisniewski's illustrations are truly stunning and much stronger than the text of his book. Wisniewski (who has since passed away) was a puppeteer, which explains why he chose to illustrate his book with cut-outs that resemble the set of a puppet-stage. The illustrations are very rich, detailed, and vivid; even the colors, heavy on orange and brown earthy tones, fit the story of a creature made of clay.

Wisniewski's story is a retelling of a myth that surrounds a historical rabbi, one which requires a lot of cultural and historical context to be properly understood. Some of that context is included in the story's text, and the rest is in a note at the back of the book. The note, however, is written at an adult level, containing many Latin-character-set transcriptions of Hebrew words as well as references to the Jewish Cabala. This history is much more complex than a child can easily comprehend, but an adult should be able to explain the context to a child who wants to know more about the story.

Comparison:

Both reviews are roughly similar. Both summarize the plot (*Kirkus Reviews* more briefly than Robinson), and both praise the Wisniewski's cut-paper collages. In addition, *Horn Book* notes similarities between *Golem* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, hypothesizing that the legend of golem may have influenced Shelley's creation. Both reviewers as well as Wisniewski himself are careful to place *Golem* within its proper historical, social, and literary context.

Rev. of *Golem* by David Wisniewski. *Kirkus Reviews* October 21, 1996: 1410.

Robinson, Lolly. Rev. of *Golem* by David Wisniewski. *Horn Book* 73 (1997): 60.

Title: *Bridge to Terabithia*
Author: Katherine Paterson
Genre: Chapter book
Audience: 9-11 years
Annotation: Two friends, Jess and Leslie, construct a magical kingdom together. Terabithia is their own secret, special place and their common refuge, until fate steps in and tears them apart.

Review:

This was not my first time reading *Bridge to Terabithia*, but the first time was so long ago that I might not have read it at all, and only heard about it from a friend. I didn't remember the plot, only that it was sad, and I certainly didn't remember crying about it.

Bridge to Terabithia is about friendship and its capacity for changing the nature of solitude, even after friends are parted. It is also about grief.

Having myself lost a friend to death, I recognize the emotional rollercoaster that Jess rides after Leslie's death: guilt for having fun while a friend is dying, shock, denial, eventual reconciliation and "moving on." The stages that Jess experiences are real; my only criticism is that they are unrealistically short. In the book, Jess starts rebuilding Terabithia in a matter of days, giving the appearance that he is healed, whereas real grief is both gradual and cyclical, with bad days following good days. On the other hand, Paterson probably made a conscious decision to portray grief in such a stylized manner; it is, after all, a children's book. As such, she is to be commended for treating a complex topic with both compassion and wisdom.

Comparison:

Realism is the overwhelming impression that both reviews convey; the word "realistic" (and synonyms like "believable") appear at least two or three times in each. However, the reviews take different approaches. While Jack Forman gives a fairly detailed plot review (giving away the ending completely!) and then performs a two-sentence analysis, the *Horn Book* reviewer (whose initials are A.A.F.) focuses his attention on more literary considerations like character development and even theme. Even the plot summary is woven through with characterizations like, "Gradually, however, [Leslie] became [Jesse's] guide into the world of music art, and literature." That sentence contains some plot but is more about the natures of Leslie and Jesse than anyone else. Moreover, the *Horn Book* article quotes from *Bridge to Terabithia*, bringing in Paterson's voice. For all these reasons, I found the *Horn Book* article much more revealing than Forman's, since another book could have exactly the same plot and yet not the same soul as *Bridge to Terabithia*.

A.A.F. Rev. of *Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Paterson. *Horn Book* 54 (1978): 48-50.

Forman, Jack. Rev. of *Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Paterson. *School Library Journal* November 1977: 61.

Title: *The Amber Spyglass*
Author: Philip Pullman
Genre: Chapter book
Audience: 11 years and up
Annotation: Two pre-teens named Lyra and Will challenge the forces of religion and myth in a multiple-universal epic. And naturally, they save the world.

Review:

The Amber Spyglass is the last book in Philip Pullman's trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. I read the whole trilogy but chose to review the last one because it gives me the opportunity to comment on the whole trilogy rather than just one book. Indeed, I would find it very hard to consider any one of these books as separate from its companion volumes, even though it is now even harder for me to confine my ramblings to a couple of paragraphs.

Even though I initially found it hard to get into the first volume of the trilogy, I have ironically come to love it for the same reason as my initial unenthusiasm. The female main character, Lyra, is a young hellion with whom I seemed to have nothing in common and with whom I therefore did not identify. I kept reading because the book had been so well recommended, and Pullman's brilliant characterization soon made me glad of my persistence. A boy and a girl are the heroes, but there are no absolute villains. People do the wrong thing for the right reasons, or the right thing for the wrong reasons, and everyone's reasons are different. Every character is round.

It is hard for me to assign this trilogy to a certain audience, because it can be read on so many levels. The action is straightforward enough for a youngster to read it as an action story, but the symbolism behind that action is complex enough for a theologian. A ten-year-old sees Will and Lyra saving the world, but I see the Garden of Eden.

Comparison:

The Amber Spyglass is a book whose racing plot is matched and even overshadowed by its philosophical and theological implications. The two reviews I read, one from *Booklist* and the other from *Horn Book*, reviewed the book positively but chose to cover different balances of plot and philosophy.

Ilene Cooper's review in *Booklist* mentions the theological aspect but focuses mainly on the plot and on the controversial aspects of the book. The highlight of the article is a short interview with Philip Pullman in which he says, about the religious controversy which will arise around the book, "Well, I should be interested to see what happens. I'm very grateful to J. K. Rowling for deflecting everyone's attention. In my experience, people who object to books usually have not read the books; they've read about the books and what others say is in them." In my opinion, Cooper's focus on controversy is more likely to provoke it than otherwise.

In contrast, Maguire encourages readers to consider the implications of the book's radical theology with a philosophical eye. Whether they believe it or not, they can try out new ideas without letting their own convictions come under attack. "So put another log on the fire and draw your chairs closer and tell me," Maguire invites. "... Is there a creator of all things?"

While I personally found Maguire's review much more interesting, I think that it is more interesting to the individual reader than to the selector. Cooper's is better for selection, or maybe just for librarians to know what kind of hullabaloo will follow their purchase of this book. Because *The Amber Spyglass* is the third book in a trilogy, libraries will already have bought the first two books and will want to complete their set, whether or not the last volume is any good. Therefore a review for the purpose of selection is fairly irrelevant.

Cooper, Ilene. "Darkness visible—Philip Pullman's *Amber Spyglass*." Rev. of *The Amber Spyglass*, by Philip Pullman. *Booklist* 97 (2000): 354-355.

Maguire, Gregory. Rev. of *The Amber Spyglass*, by Philip Pullman. *Horn Book* 76 (2000): 735-738.

Title: *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism*
Author: Georgia Byng
Genre: Chapter book
Audience: 8-10 years
Annotation: Unstoppable, 10-year-old orphan Molly Moon uses her new-found talent for hypnotism to escape her orphanage for the excitement of New York and Broadway.

Review:

Molly Moon came highly recommended (in my weblog comments, by a Canadian children's librarian who said it was her "latest favourite"), but I have to admit that it doesn't live up to my expectations. It's not a bad book, but it's simply too shallow and too much like Harry Potter for me to be very convinced by its characters and story.

Like Harry, Molly Moon is an orphan living in an intolerable situation, which she escapes by a form of "magic:" hypnotism. Molly uses her new-found talent for hypnotism to control everyone around her: the headmistress, her fellow orphans, airline employees... Molly's powers are apparently without limit, even though in reality, hypnotism can't make people do things that they're completely opposed to. It can only suggest, but Molly uses it to bring people completely under her will. The one limitation to Molly's hypnosis is that its influence will eventually wear off, but we don't find that out until the very end of the book, when Molly's friend Rocky tells her about it.

The book would be a lot better if its characters were more round (even Molly is flat as a pancake) and if Molly grew through the book. There's no real sense that she learns anything on her adventures; even though Molly makes different choices at the end, those choices and the lessons that led to them are taught through words, not action. For example, if Molly got in trouble because she was over-confident and her influence on someone wore off, that would be a more realistic way of learning about the limitations of her powers. Overall, the book could do with a healthy shot of realism.

Comparison:

Both reviews compare *Molly Moon* to Lemony Snicket's books. Both reviews also inaccurately describe Molly's foe as a "professor;" although the text initially refers to him as "Professor Nockman," he is not a professor but a professional thief, and most of the book refers to him as simply "Nockman."

The reviews differ most severely in their opinions about the book's conclusion. While Rogers speaks favorably of *Molly Moon*'s "satisfying and very moral ending," I agree more with *Kirkus Reviews*' anonymous article, which is critical of the ending: "The salvation of archetypically evil (and archetypically disgusting) villains is dissatisfying in a tale that seems otherwise to be drawing on Roald Dahl and Lemony Snicket. Clumsy, but amusing." *Molly Moon* is no doubt hilarious for kids, but cheap laughs are no sacrifice for true story-telling.

Rev. of *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism*, by Georgia Byng. *Kirkus Reviews* 15 April 2003: 605.

Rogers, Susan L. Rev. of *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism*, by Georgia Byng. *School Library Journal* 49.6 (2003): 137.

Title: *The Bad Beginning*

Author: Lemony Snicket

Genre: Chapter book

Audience: 8-11 years

Annotation: Newly-orphaned Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire face the evils of “a greedy and repulsive villain, itchy clothing, a disastrous fire, a plot to steal their fortune, and cold porridge for breakfast” with courage and creativity.

Review:

This is the first book in Lemony Snicket’s *Series of Unfortunate Events*, and although it calls itself “The Bad Beginning,” it is anything but bad. The marvelous thing, I think, is that in spite of all the horrible things that happen to the Baudelaire children, somehow Lemony Snicket manages to infuse the story with enough hope that you never quite believe that it’s not going to turn out all right in the end, in spite of all assurances to the contrary.

I can’t quite pin down why this is, but my best guess is that it’s in the characters. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny are all clever and resourceful in their own distinct ways, and even when their plight seems most severe, they never give up their determination to prevail against the adults who either fail to help or actively try to hurt them. Snicket’s portrayal of his adult characters is also curiously brilliant and very slightly caricatured, as if they were real-world adults seen through children’s eyes.

Comparison:

Both reviewers of *The Bad Beginning* seem to have had a hard time describing the book, because they each gave a plot summary (Lempke’s limited to half a sentence, Howard’s sprawling over a couple of paragraphs) instead of truly characterizing the book. Howard goes farther towards a real review, evoking her personal reaction to the story, the author’s real identity (an American, Daniel Handler), and British readers’ likely reaction to the *Series of Unfortunate Events* books. Lempke rather objectively notes Snicket’s “droll humor, reminiscent of Edwin Gorey’s” and the “old-fashioned story-telling style” that may confuse some children but amuse many others. Despite her efforts at neutral review, it is in Howard’s unabashedly partial article that I recognize the true nature of Lemony Snicket’s stories.

Howard, Sandra. Rev. of *The Bad Beginning*, by Lemony Snicket. *Spectator* August 25 2001: 32.

Lempke, Susan Dove. Rev. of *The Bad Beginning*, by Lemony Snicket. *Booklist* 95 (1999): 707.

Booktalk:

Do you like happy endings? [Wait for nods.]

If you do, then you shouldn’t read this book, *The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket. “In this book, not only is there no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle.” Lemony Snicket apparently does nothing but attempt to discourage people from reading his books, but anyone who’s had anything to do with kids knows that the more you tell them not to do something, the more they want to do it. And in my opinion, the events aren’t quite so unfortunate after all.

Title: *Artemis Fowl*

Author: Eoin Colfer

Genre: Chapter book

Audience: 12-14 years

Annotation: Twelve-year-old criminal mastermind Artemis Fowl doesn't know what he's getting into when he attempts to rejuvenate his family fortune by kidnapping a fairy, in this modern and tech-heavy spoof on traditional fairy lore.

Review:

Artemis Fowl is based on an inherently gimmicky premise, that of fairies who have not died out but simply moved underground and developed technology which, in addition to their magic, allows them to escape notice by mere humans. Given that, I would not have expected myself to like it, and indeed I was not terribly thrilled by the setting or by the plot, except for the obligatory suspense of "what comes next." However, I found myself increasingly touched by the character of Artemis, who is of course an evil and opportunistic child genius but who has his own kind of moral code, which includes absolute loyalty to his butler (aptly surnamed "Butler") and love for his insane mother. I couldn't condone what Artemis did, but I grew into affection for him, and I have a lot of respect for an author who can create a complex and ambiguous character like that.

Comparison:

The reviews of *Artemis Fowl* were all so different that I couldn't narrow them down to just two. The biggest split in opinion was between Estes' *Booklist* review and the other three; Estes loved the book, saying that "characterizations and dialogue enhance a rollicking tale that will have readers rolling on the floor..."

All the others hated it, but for different reasons, and some like features that other reviewers despise. Rausch dislikes the "choppy sentences and ornate languages" and criticizes the character of Artemis ("too stiff and enigmatic to be interesting") but praises the "mouthy and eccentric" fairies. In contrast, *Publishers Weekly's* anonymous review draws a contrast between "Artemis's wily, autocratic personality" and "the relatively bland Holly and her cohorts." Finally, Sachs produces the longest and most biting commentary, mainly comparing Colfer's novels unfavorably with J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books and accusing him and his publishers of attempting to be that year's Harry Potter. She ends her review with the biting conclusion: "Colfer shouldn't be blamed for being a lesser writer than Rowling; but he can be charged with producing an awkward, calculated, humorless and mean-spirited book."

Estes, Sally. Rev. of *Artemis Fowl*, by Eoin Colfer. *Booklist* 97 (2001): 1554.

Rausch, Tim. Rev. of *Artemis Fowl*, by Eoin Colfer. *School Library Journal* 47.5 (2001): 148.

Rev. of *Artemis Fowl*, by Eoin Colfer. *Publishers Weekly* April 9, 2001: 75.

Sachs, Andrea. "A Case of Fowl Play: A Less Magical Book Tries to Hone in on Harry Potter." *Time* April 30, 2001: 76.

Title: *Ll: See it. Say it. Hear it.*

Author: Kelly Doudna

Genre: Early Reader: Phonics

Audience: Preschool

Annotation: This phonics easy reader facilitates learning the “L” sound with bright pictures and “L” letters colored in red.

Review:

I’m not a fan of the phonics method, but this series appeared better to me than the others that I saw on the shelf in the library, simply because it colors the letter in question (in my case, “L”) in red to make it stand out from the surrounding word. Each page with text is faced with a full-color, full-page photograph of children demonstrating the sentence. The book concludes with a question, a word list grouped by part of speech, and a list of four “More Ll Words” with small pictures. That’s all good, but the sentences don’t connect with each other logically in any matter, so children are unlikely to find them interesting or to want to read these books.

Comparison:

[Note: I could only find one review of Doudna’s series of phonics readers; this is probably because they are not very good.]

Krapp gives a brief description like mine, adding that she finds Doudna’s approach rather didactic. Instead of the “See it. Say it. Hear it.” series, she recommends Jane Belk Moncure’s “Sound box” series because it includes stories rather than disconnected sentences. The review is very short, but it says everything about the series that needs to be said. I found the recommendation of a better series particularly informative.

Krapp, Lisa Gangemi. Rev. of *Aa: See It. Say It. Hear It*, by Kelly Doudna. *School Library Journal* 47.2 (2001): 110.

Title: *Go, Dog. Go!*

Author: P.D. Eastman

Genre: Early Reader: Beginning

Audience: 4-6 years

Annotation: The familiar style of Dr. Seuss (also known as P.D. Eastman) guides big dogs and little dogs around and about and to a party in a tree!

Review:

The reason I love this book is that when I was a senior in college, my glee club performed a complex musical setting of it with five speaking parts and three percussionists. It was lively and enthusiastic, and now when I read *Go, Dog. Go!* I can't help hearing the rhythms and bangs in my head.

I took my reading-journal homework with me to visit my boyfriend's mother, and when she saw *Go, Dog. Go!*, she went mad with joy and started reading it to me. I was fascinated to hear that her speech contained many of the same rhythms and inflections that were in our performance.

This isn't a very substantive review, but my point is that everyone loves this book and its words and its sounds and its rhythms. It has a pulse and a beat and a soul that extends far beyond little dogs with cars.

Comparison:

The interesting thing about these reviews is that I found one from 1965 and another from 2000; obviously, they take very different approaches. (I also found a review from 1982, when it was reissued in paperback.) The older review is embedded in a larger article which gives an overview of new (in 1965) children's literature. It is a conventional review, enumerating the 75-word vocabulary and the "comic and descriptive that the child can guess at the text as he looks, and learn without pain the connexion between word and image."

In contrast, the *Horn Book* article from three years ago compares *Go, Dog. Go!* to a Zen koan and concludes that this is the one book from the last hundred years that he would want to place in the hands of a child one hundred years from now. While entertaining, this type of article is less than helpful in deciding whether to buy the book. By the time the article was written, *Go, Dog. Go!* had been in libraries for thirty-five years, circulating regularly. Scieszka's article is nostalgic and reflective about a book that everyone already knows and loves.

[Lost author and title.] *The Times Literary Supplement* June 17, 1965: 507.

Scieszka, Jon. "Future Classics." Rev. of *Go, Dog. Go!*, by P.D. Eastman. *Horn Book* 76 (2000): 662-663.

Title: *The Adventures of Captain Underpants*

Author: Dav Pilkey

Genre: Early Reader: Short Chapter

Audience: Eight-year-olds of all ages[†]

Annotation: Fourth-graders George and Harold have fun publishing their Captain Underpants comics, until they bring him to life and it gets out of control!

Review:

The Adventures of Captain Underpants is completely horrible by any rational standard. The drawings are haphazard, the plot is illogical and random, and the characters are flat as a pancake. All the appeal of the book is in its cheap jokes. The only real criticism I have is that some words, supposed to have been written by the two main characters, are intentionally misspelled. While it is perhaps realistic that children might misspell some words, I think that a book whose purpose is to teach children to read should not exemplify (or even glamorize) spelling mistakes.

Nevertheless, *Captain Underpants* is so bad that although it doesn't make fake doggy doo-doo an art form, it is an entirely entertaining read. According to my boyfriend, it has the same appeal as "Godzilla vs. Mr. T" (if that exists). First-grade boys, especially, will eat *Captain Underpants* up.

Comparison:

The *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus* reviews are roughly similar except in style. Both briefly describe the plot and conclude that children will adore these books, but *Kirkus* has more style. For that reason, it was more persuasive and also more useful. Not only are the descriptions more vivid and detailed, the reviewer sounds like s/he actually enjoyed the book. The review concludes: "There'll be no silence in the library once readers get hold of this somewhat classier alternative to Barf-o-Rama books and their crude ilk."

Hopf, Mary M. Rev. of *The Adventures of Captain Underpants*, by Dav Pilkey. *School Library Journal* 43.12 (1997): 99.

Rev. of *The Adventures of Captain Underpants*, by Dav Pilkey. *Kirkus Reviews* June 1, 1997: 878.

[†] My twenty-one-going-on-five-year-old boyfriend couldn't stop laughing when he read this book. That's got to mean something...

Title: *Up and Down with Kate*

Author: Kay Choraó

Genre: Early Reader

Audience: 4-6 years

Annotation: Four short, easy-to-read stories lead Kate through every-day trials and tribulations like drawing a picture and breaking a vase.

Review:

Choraó's heroine, a girl named Kate whom I imagine as about four years old, leads us through four short stories about her life. In my favorite story, "Artist," Kate draws a crayon picture, but no one knows what it is, until her grandmother comes along.

"You made a beautiful drawing," said Grandma.

"It is not a dragon or a horsey or scribble," said Kate.

"Of course not. It is a garden," said Grandma.

"Yes!" said Kate.

"Anyone can see that," said Grandma.

To me this exactly encapsulates the frustrations of young, misunderstood artists. A child reading this story would identify strongly with Kate's feelings of anger and sadness. Choraó has managed to capture Kate's emotions poignantly, with respect and without belittling the importance of children's artistic efforts, so that I now have an increased understanding of and respect for the artists of what I previously viewed as crayon scribble.

Comparison:

There is hardly any difference between these two reviews; they each have extremely brief plot summaries and conclude that "Choraó gets it just right," (Cooper) with "humorous and heartwarming (Cooper again) stories that "ring true for young readers" (*Kirkus Reviews*) and illustrations that both match the text and make it easier for beginning readers to understand. Neither has any criticisms of the book.

Cooper, Ilene. Rev. of *Up and Down with Kate*, by Kay Choraó. *Booklist* 98 (2002): 1532.

Rev. of *Up and Down with Kate*, by Kay Choraó. *Kirkus Reviews* May 15, 2002: 729.

Booktalk:

Up and Down with Kate by Kay Choraó is about the "ups and downs" of a girl named Kate who I imagine is about four years old. It contains four short stories, all about Kate, and my favorite story is called "Artist." Kate takes her crayons and draws a picture, but no one sees it for what it is. Her mother thinks it's a dragon, and her father thinks it's a horse, and her brother says it's a scribble. So Kate gets very upset and goes outside and sits on the swing. [Read pp. 34-35]

Title: *The Story of Mrs. Lovewright and Purrless Her Cat*

Author: Lore Segal; illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky

Genre: Early Reader

Audience: 4-7 years

Annotation: “There’s no being cozy without a cat,” but Mrs. Lovewright’s cat won’t purr!

Review:

Mrs. Lovewright is cold and alone, and she says “there’s no being cozy without a cat,” so she gets a little kitten. But the kitten won’t purr or sleep on her lap, so there’s no being cozy *with* a cat, either. As long as Mrs. Lovewright tries to force Purrless to be cozy, Purrless fights back; only when she accepts his choice, however uncomprehendingly, can she pet him. This is a wonderfully illustrated demonstration of the virtue of acceptance (even if not understanding).

Comparison:

These two reviews couldn’t be more different. Casavant finds that “Segal should be commended for her attempt to demonstrate poorly motivated pet ownership and its potential for dire consequences” but criticizes “excessive and inappropriate violence” and “jarring transitions,” although she praises Zelinsky’s illustrations. In contrast, Weldon performs an analysis of the themes and symbols in the story (Does Mrs. Lovewright simply care too much? Are Purrless’ yellow eye-slits alluding to the Devil?) and predicts that children will relish the “vulgarity and energy of reality” in this story, which is so different from the “sweetness, tweeness and seedy morality” that it is in much children’s literature and which Casavant insists on finding even in this story.

Casavant, Xenda. Rev. of *The Story of Mrs. Lovewright and Purrless Her Cat*, by Lore Segal. *School Library Journal* December 1985: 82.

Weldon, Fay. Rev. of *The Story of Mrs. Lovewright and Purrless Her Cat*, by Lore Segal. *New York Times Book Review* Nov. 10, 1985: 35.

Title: *The Loch Ness Monster: Opposing Viewpoints* (1989)
Author: Robert D. San Souci
Genre: Nonfiction: the Loch Ness Monster
Audience: 10-12 years
Annotation: Does Nessie exist? San Souci presents the evidence and invites the reader to make his or her own decision.

Review:

I chose to review this book because of the “Opposing Viewpoints” subtitle. Almost any book about Nessie is probably going to give at least lip service to the idea of presenting multiple viewpoints, but that subtitle promises a focus on critical thinking which the book fulfills, in my opinion. The text is ninety pages long and printed in relatively small print (for a children’s book). Its six chapters cover not only Nessie and her history but Loch Ness itself and the conditions which make it so hard to verify whether or not a huge underwater beast lives there. The book includes many black-and-white photographs, a glossary, a list of books “for further exploration,” an additional bibliography (presumably adult books), and an index. The impartial text and conflicting quotations in sidebars foster critical thinking.

It is no longer the most current book on the shelf, but as nothing particularly significant has happened on the Loch Ness front in the last fifteen years, it is not really out of date. In my opinion, this book should not be weeded until a new edition is released, because its emphasis on critical thinking is essential. Nessie is a perfect topic for this, because children not only will gobble up the information but will be eager to pick a side and defend it.

Comparison:

[I could not find any reviews of this title, but I included it because I thought it was the best Loch Ness book I found.]

Title: *The Loch Ness Monster* (2002)
Author: Jacqueline Laks Gorman
Genre: Nonfiction: the Loch Ness Monster
Audience: 7-9 years
Annotation: Vivid color photographs and easy-to-read text bring the legend of Nessie to life.

Review:

This book seems to me almost like an easy reader, with large text and big photographs. It is bright and shiny and new, and its information is up to date. In many respects it is a newer and smaller version of San Souci's version, since they cover the same information in roughly the same order, though with different levels of detail.

The most interesting part of the book is an up-to-date recommended reading list which includes not only five nonfiction titles (of which two are Yorke's and Landau's, which I am also reviewing) but five fiction titles, both nonfiction and fiction videos, and seven websites. Gorman also mentions two web search engines (Yahooligans! and Google) as well as some suggested keywords. A short glossary and index are on the last page.

Comparison:

Brouse reviews Gorman's series called "XScience: an Imagination Library Series" (titles include the Bermuda Triangle and Bigfoot as well as Nessie). According to her, these books are short but include a lot of information for their size. Theories and a sampling of the evidence are expressed clearly. In addition, the books are colorful and appealing, both on the cover and inside the pages.

This review would have been helpful if I didn't have access to the book myself, but it didn't provide any insights that I didn't already have from reading the book on my own.

Brouse, Ann G. Rev. of *The Loch Ness Monster*, by Jacqueline Laks Gorman. *School Library Journal* 49.2 (2003): 130-131.

Title: *Beastly Tales: Yeti, Bigfoot, and the Loch Ness Monster* (1998)
Author: Malcolm Yorke
Genre: Nonfiction: the Loch Ness Monster
Audience: 7-9 years
Annotation: Learn to read about modern-day mystery monsters: Yeti, Bigfoot, and the Loch Ness Monster.

Review:

Yorke's book is part of an "Eyewitness Readers" reading-program series. This is not a bad thing overall, but it does mean that the book's main emphasis is on sentence structure and vocabulary rather than on imparting information. In addition, out of approximately 45 pages of text, only 16 pages are devoted to Nessie. The rest of the book is devoted to Bigfoot and the Abominable Snowman. The text is very large, and at least half of the space is devoted to color photographs and illustrations.

Like the other books about Loch Ness, it contains a glossary at the end of the text. However, it does not have a recommended reading list. Another criticism I have is that the sections are not well-defined, either through format or semantic cues; I turned the page and started reading about the Yeti without realizing at first that the topic had changed.

Overall it is a good book to engage children who are learning how to read and who are fascinated by these modern-day mystery monsters, but they should look elsewhere for real information.

Comparison:

[I could not find any reviews of this title.]

Title: *The Loch Ness Monster* (1993)
Author: Elaine Landau
Genre: Nonfiction: the Loch Ness Monster
Audience: 8-11 years
Annotation: Color photographs illustrate this investigation of the Loch Ness monster mystery.

Review:

Landau's book falls in between Gorman's and San Souci's. The text is a middle size, there is a substantial amount of it (though far from as much as San Souci's book), and the photographs are colorful and engaging. Landau mentions many of the same facts as San Souci but in a less in-depth fashion. The book includes a glossary, recommended reading list (including San Souci's title), and an index. At the very end is a note about the author which concludes, "While researching this book, Ms. Landau visited Loch Ness. She arrived in Scotland firmly believing that the Loch Ness Monster was nothing more than a myth. But by the time she returned to the United States she was no longer sure that this was so."

Comparison:

The Horn Book Guide reviewer praises the "balanced, objective discussion" of controversial topics "of perennial interest" (meaning that the books will fly off the shelves). The review concludes that "Landau avoids the sensational and treats her subjects and readers with respect." That is all worthy and important.

Brouse notes that "no new evidence is presented" in this new title about Nessie, so she concludes, like me, that "in the absence of any very recent findings, earlier summaries of monster stories ... are still useful." Therefore, she recommends three earlier titles (two published in 1987 and one in 1983) which "supply more of an older history of sightings and provide more comparison with several like creatures around the world." As with other reviews, I find cross-references like this to be very useful.

Brouse, Ann G. Rev. of *The Loch Ness Monster*, by Elaine Landau. *School Library Journal* 40.2 (1994): 112.

S.G.K. Rev. of *The Loch Ness Monster*, by Elaine Landau. *Horn Book Guide* Spring 1994: 94.

Title: *The Loch Ness Monster* (1979)
Author: Ellen Rabinowich
Genre: Nonfiction: the Loch Ness Monster
Audience: 8-10 years
Annotation: Does Nessie exist? Find out!

Review:

Rabinowich's book is very similar to Landau's, except that it contains more drawings than photographs and is very seventies in feel. It doesn't contain anything that the other books don't have and should probably be weeded at this point, because it is so old.

Comparison:

Likewise, these reviews are very similar to the previous ones. As always, the *School Library Journal* review recommends books on the same topic, though this time the other titles are additional books for older readers rather than replacements.

B.E. Rev. of *The Loch Ness Monster*, by Ellen Rabinowich. *Booklist* 76 (1979): 127.

Blaha, Linda. Rev. of *The Loch Ness Monster*, by Ellen Rabinowich. *School Library Journal* 26.2 (1980): 49.

Title: *Once Upon Ice and Other Frozen Poems*

Author: Edited by Jane Yolen; photographs by Jason Stemple.

Genre: Nonfiction: Poetry

Audience: 5-10 years

Annotation: Jane Yolen and sixteen other poets share their poems inspired by photographs of ice in all its forms, by Yolen's son, Jason Stemple.

Review:

I'm not much of a fan of poetry, especially children's poetry, and most of the poems in his collection didn't appeal to me either. Nevertheless I found myself drawn into the first poem in the collection, Yolen's "Ice Can Scream." Poetry is like that; either it hits you, or it doesn't. Yolen's collection does a good job of gathering diverse poems on one theme, one of which will hopefully appeal to any given child.

Comparison:

Teague is unequivocally positive about Yolen's poetry collection, placing particular emphasis on the spectacular photographs and the fact that "each poem is true to its photograph." She also notes that the poems make "expressive read-alouds" and that curricular connections to various subjects such as weather, seasons, or creative writing can easily be made.

Phelan is more critical. Although she finds no fault with the photography, she says that the poetry is "uneven in quality" and that the book's complex design may "sometimes detract from [its] overall effectiveness." In her opinion, it is neither the best nor the worst poetry book in the world. Personally, I'm no judge of poetry, so I tend to agree more with Teague. In any case, poetry doesn't have to be brilliant for children or even adults to enjoy it.

Phelan, Carolyn. Rev. of *Once Upon Ice and Other Frozen Poems*, by Jane Yolen. *Booklist* 43 (1997): 212.

Teague, Betty. Rev. of *Once Upon Ice and Other Frozen Poems*, by Jane Yolen. *School Library Journal* 93.11 (1997): 937.

Title: *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*

Author: Sara Holbrook

Genre: Nonfiction: Poetry

Audience: 9-13 years

Annotation: Performance poet Sara Holbrook combines jazzy, exuberant verses with short prose articles to bring poems out of print and into life as stomping, shouting, rhyming, rollicking fun.

Review:

In stark contrast to most poetry books, which kids tend to perceive as quiet and boring, Holbrook's verses have strong rhythm and rhyme that make them impossible to read silently. More than that, they focus on topics that are relevant to kids' lives; see such titles as "The Dog Ate My Homework" and "May I Be Excused?" Holbrook suggests her own poems for kids to start performing, but she also encourages them to write and perform their own poems. The book is about getting kids out performing, listening, and enjoying poetry, and in my opinion, Holbrook has done it very well.

Comparison:

No one seems to be able to agree on an age range for this book; among the reviews I have read, estimates seem to range from second to ninth grades. A better explanation is probably to take the book apart and to consider every poem on its own; though younger children will get a kick out of shouting out one of the shorter verses, and thereby gain a positive and exciting impression of poetry, pre-teens may be more interested in Holbrook's tips about starting a poetry jam.

In other respects, the reviewers agree with me that Holbrook's jamming manual is "guaranteed to get even confirmed classroom drones out of their seats and into an audience's face" (*Kirkus Reviews*).

Blasingame, James. Rev. of *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*, by Sara Holbrook. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 46.4 (2002): 367-368.
 Rev. of *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*, by Sara Holbrook. *Kirkus Reviews* March 1, 2002: 336.

Booktalk:

[Perform poem: "May I Be Excused?"]

Meet Sara Holbrook, *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*. These poems aren't for reading, they're for getting up and shouting.

Title: *A to Zoo: Subject Access to Children's Picture Books*

Author: Carolyn W. & John A. Lima

Genre: Nonfiction: Reader's Advisory

Audience: Adults

Annotation: Access to children's picture books via controlled subject headings.

Review:

A to Zoo does just what it says on the tin: subject access to picture books. It contains a subject headings index, a "bibliographic guide" (alphabetical by author, effectively the main entry of this catalog, containing publication details etc.), a title index, and an illustrator index. The preface contains a section called "How to use this book" which describes the organization and function of the indexes. *A to Zoo* contains more than 23,000 titles and over 1,200 subjects; though it is certainly not comprehensive (especially since more titles are released every day), that is a lot of books! If a child wanted a book on a particular subject, this would be an excellent place to turn.

Comparison:

Both Cohen and Mulac agree that *A to Zoo* is very useful but that its major limitation is size. Cohen suggests that future editions should be published in two volumes, and Mulac complains that there are no annotations because of size restrictions. The two reviews are basically equivalent.

Cohen, Sharon. Rev. of *A to Zoo: Subject Access to Children's Picture Books*, by Carolyn W. and John A. Lima. *Booklist* 98 (2002): 1780.

Mulac, Carolyn M. Rev. of *A to Zoo: Subject Access to Children's Picture Books*, by Carolyn W. and John A. Lima. *Library Journal* 126.20 (2001): 108.

Title: *What Do Children Read Next?*

Author: Candy Colborn

Genre: Nonfiction: Reader's Advisory

Audience: Adults

Annotation: Reader's advisory tool for children who know what they like and want more of the same.

Review:

In contrast to *A to Zoo*, the two volumes of *What Do Children Read Next?* contain very detailed information about each of the approximately 1,600 books in its pages, including a summary, listing of characters, and even citations for review articles. It includes subject access as well as many kinds of related-work access like "Other books you might like" in the details for a book, so that people can find similar books from a known and liked item. Ten indexes provide alternative search methods.

Comparison:

Arbo's review in *School Library Journal* is rather amazing in its sheer lack of informational content. She mentions that *What Do Children Read Next?* has ten indexes, but the rest is mere assertion that the book does what it's supposed to. It's a persuasive but empty article.

In contrast, Jones' article in *American Reference Books Annual* subjects *What Do Children Read Next?* through a rigorous evaluation of its tools. Jones calls it an "annotated bibliography" and describes the information that goes into the annotations. He also asserts that *What Do Children Read Next?* is different from other guides because of its ten indexes. The last half of the review is devoted to the "minor defects" of the work, such as bland and sometimes vague plot summaries and the exclusion of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys from the character index. I found this review the more helpful of the two, since it not only provides more detail but explains defects as well.

Arbo, Ruth. Rev. of *What Do Children Read Next?*, by Candy Colborn. *School Library Journal* 40.10 (1994): 49.

Jones, Raymond E. Rev. of *What Do Children Read Next?*, by Candy Colborn. *American Reference Books Annual* 1995: 488.

Title: *The Pirate Queen*

Author: Emily Arnold McCully

Genre: Nonfiction: Biography

Audience: 6-9 years

Annotation: Grania O'Malley was a female Irish pirate with her own lands and fleet and guts enough to stand up to Queen Elizabeth I herself.

Review:

McCully's glowing illustrations flesh out the sparse details of the life of Grania O'Malley, a female pirate who lived in Ireland during the sixteenth century. Although the story is not what I would call a full biography, it covers Grania's life from birth to (unknown) death. In fact, details about her life are so few that her biography is well-suited to a picture book, where illustrations can expand on the few known anecdotes and bring Grania to life in spite of the little we know about her.

McCully's watercolors are vivid and just the slightest bit rough-edged, like the courageous Grania herself.

Comparison:

The *Publishers Weekly* review is very detailed about the life of Grania O'Malley and pays slightly less attention to McCully's handling of the story, except to praise the "sweeping watercolors." In contrast, *Kirkus Reviews* doesn't summarize the plot but is more informative in other ways. It analyzes the presentation of Grania's swashbuckling, criminal life, including the moral issues which are raised by the fact that she is portrayed in a positive if not outright glamorous light. The review also notes that McCully only fleetingly refers to the historical context of Grania's fight against the English. Grania is shown as a strong, courageous hero, and yet she is a pirate and a vagabond. The review concludes that "readers old enough to grapple with the moral issues will love it."

Rev. of *The Pirate Queen*, by Emily Arnold McCully. *Kirkus Reviews* October 15, 1995 (vol. 63) p. 496.

Rev. of *The Pirate Queen*, by Emily Arnold McCully. *Publishers Weekly* October 9, 1995: 85.