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Book Reviews

Children's literature: A vehicle to promote multicultural curriculum at its best

The reform movement described as "Multiculturalism" or "Multicultural Curricular Reform" essentially is designed "to change the total educational environment so that students from diverse racial and ethnic groups, both gender groups, exceptional students, and students from each social class group will experience equal educational opportunities in schools, colleges, and universities" (Banks and Banks, 1989).

At the highest level of curricular reform, far beyond the "heroes and holidays" approach, stu-

dents identify social problems and concerns, make decisions, and take actions to help resolve problems they have identified in a unit of study. They are encouraged to improve their decision-making, social action skills, data-gathering skills, and ability to work in groups. Aren't these goals highly aligned with goals long-considered valuable in classrooms stressing the use of wide reading of excellent books? When we recognize that the essence of multicultural education is *building strong character and competence* among our citizens, it is easy to see that this is precisely what many educa-

tors focusing on literacy through excellent children's literature have been doing for decades!

In this section, we present a compilation of excellent books from a variety of genres. We have categorized these books according to **Universal Experience**, **Lessons from History**, **The Arts Humanize Civilization**, and **Character Building**.

Note about book levels:

Book levels are identified after each title as All (**A**), Preschool/Primary (**P**), Middle (**M**), and Older (**O**) and are meant to indicate audience interest levels, not reading levels. These notations correspond approximately to **A** = all ages, **P** = ages 3-7, **M** = ages 8-9, and **O** = ages 10+.

UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE

Ajmera, Maya and John D. Ivanko. **To Be a Kid**. Photos by Peace Corps volunteers and award-winning photographers. Charlesbridge Publishing, 1999. 30 pp. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-88106-841-1. **P-M**, *Nonfiction, Culture, Childhood, Sense of Time and Space*. Colorful photographs from forty countries show how the lives of children intersect with others around the world. Spanning the pages are a few sentences that clearly define "to be a kid" with powerful photos celebrating what connects children: learning, playing, caring for animals, dancing, enjoying family, and "goofing off." This hopeful, cross-cultural view closes with kids from China to the US "making friends that last forever and ever."

Beard, Darleen Bailey. **Twister**. Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999. Unpaged. \$16.00. ISBN: 0-374-37977-7. **P-M**, *Contemporary realistic fiction, Siblings, Family, Tornadoes, Fear*. A sunny day becomes an emotional rollercoaster in this tense story with a gentle ending when a thunder/ lightning/hail storm with a twister send two children into the storm cellar. They wait anxiously while their mother goes to help a neighbor.

Dillon, Zach. **This One's for You!** Photographs by author. Landmark Editions, 1999. 29 pp. \$15.95. ISBN: 933849-72-9. **M-A**, *Photo narrative, Death, Grief, Anger, Reconciliation, Family Relationships, Published students*. When his mom is severely injured in an automobile accident and his father makes the difficult decision to remove

her life supports, Joey is unable to forgive him until his pet helps him understand. This sensitive and well-written story, by the 13-year-old winner of the 1998 Written and Illustrated by ... Awards Contest can promote needed, "safe" discussion about a topic which everyone experiences sooner or later.

Edwards, Michelle. **Pa Lia's First Day**. Illustrated by author. Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999. 50 pp. \$14.00. **P**, *Early Chapter Book, School, Friendship, Conflict Resolution, Jackson Friends series*. On Pa Lia's first day at Jackson Magnet School, her brother abandons her! Tears flow until Calliope James rescues her. Learning they are both in Mrs. Fennessey's second grade, Pa Lia is relieved until fear overtakes her when she gets Calliope and her best friend Howie in trouble. Their friendship is sealed when Pa Lia bravely admits she passed the notes that made them laugh.

Kajikawa, Kimiko. **Sweet Dreams: How Animals Sleep**. Illustrated with photographs. Henry Holt and Co., 1999, Unpaged. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-8050-5890-7. **P-M**, *Animals, Sleep Behavior*. The simplicity of this book is deceiving. Very young children will love the rhythmic language and sometimes humorous photographs of sleeping animals. Older children will also appreciate the appendix which gives more specific information about each of the animals and points to human sleep patterns.

Lemieux, Michele. **Stormy Night**. Kids Can Press, 1999. Unpaged. \$15.9. ISBN: 1-55074-692-8. **A**, *Growing up, Philosophy of Life*. One stormy night, after her usual night time rituals, the protagonist finds she cannot sleep because "too many questions are buzzing through my head." Readers then go along for an extended philosophic journey. "Is my whole life already worked out in advance? Or will I have to find my way all by myself?" Each page contains one simple but profound, introspective question and is accompanied by a simple but clever line drawing, many of which are filled with visual metaphors and allusions. Originally published in German, this volume will resonate for young and old alike as it poses the age-old questions that everyone ponders.

Silverman, Erica. **Raisel's Riddle**. Illustrated by Susan Gaber. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Unpaged. \$16.00. ISBN: 0-374-36168-1. **M**, *Folk literature, Cinderella stories, Wisdom, Jewish culture, Feast of Purim*. Raisel is raised by her grandfather, a poor scholar. After he dies, she goes to the city to find work and is taken in by the Rabbi. The

Rabbi's cook is jealous and makes Raisel work from sun up to sundown.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Beck, Katie. **The Moas.** Illustrated by author. Landmark Editions, 1999. 29 pp. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-933849-73-7. **A**, *Historical fiction, Extinction, Maori (New Zealand) culture, Point of view, Being proactive, Published students.* Replete with stunning, bold pencil drawings, this book by a 16-year-old winner of the National Written and Illustrated by... Awards Contest tells the tragic fate of a species which became so fat and lazy that it lost its talent to effect survival.

Bunting, Eve. **A Picnic in October.** Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999. 29 pp. \$16.00. ISBN: 0-15-201656-2. **P-M**, *Fiction, Statue of Liberty, Immigration, Italian Americans, Symbols, Empathy.* Tony grumbles as he and his family journey by bus and ferry to Liberty Island where they picnic and celebrate Lady Liberty's birthday. Grandma even recites "Give me your tired..." It's all so embarrassing until Tony sees how a family of new Americans stands and looks at the statue. Then he understands.

Levitin, Sonia. **Taking Charge.** Illustrated by Cat Bowman Smith. Orchard Books, 1999, Unpaged, \$16.95. ISBN: 0-531-30149-4. **P**, *Picture book, American history, Strong female character, Traditional family, Series.* Having survived adventures in Nine for California and Boom Town, pioneer Amanda faces another when Mama must return to Missouri for a family crisis and leaves Amanda in charge. Amanda believes she can care for Pa, three brothers, and a baby alone, but when the stable catches fire she learns how helpful neighbors are.

Mazer, Norma Fox. **Good Night, Maman.** Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999. 189 pp. \$16.00. ISBN: 0-15-201468-3. **O**, *Fiction, Holocaust, Refugees, Family, Life Cycle.* The German occupation of Paris in 1940 ends the "real world" of ten-year-old Karin Levi, a Jew. They kill her Papa and force her family to hide and live on the run. In 1944, Karin and brother Marc reach safety in the American refugee camp in Oswego, NY, far from their ill mother, Maman. Karin chronicles the challenges and joys of their existence in letters to "Dearest Maman," soon to become her "Dream Book" when she learns Maman has died. Mazer provides invaluable insights into what "refugee" means in this notable Holocaust title.

Miller, William. **Night Golf.** Illustrated by Cedric Lucas. Lee and Low, 1999, Unpaged. \$15.95. ISBN: 1-880000-79-2. **P-M**, *African-Americans, Golf, Prejudice, Perseverance, Sport history-1950s.* When young James found a rusted golf club and old balls in the garbage, he figured he'd found his sport. That is, until he's confronted with the harsh reality that golf is a rich white man's game. Since the only blacks on the course are caddies, spunky James gets a job carrying clubs. With the help of an older caddie he not only learns to play, at night by the light of the moon, but also is able to prove himself to the white players.

Myers, Walter Dean. **At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England.** Scholastic Press, 1999, 146 pp. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-590-48669-1. **O**, *Sarah Forbes Bonett, Biography, 19th Century English History, Slavery.* Captured for slavery and held for a ritualistic death in West Africa, a young girl is rescued by a British sea captain, taken to England, and placed under the protection of Queen Victoria. Carefully researched and written in surprising detail, the account is fascinating reading which can be integrated with the study of Victorian England, slavery, and women's history.

Turner, Ann. **Red Flower Goes West.** Illustrated by Dennis Nolan. Hyperion, 1999, Unpaged. \$14.99. ISBN: 0-7868-0313-4. **M**, *Picture book, American pioneer family, Determination.* As a pioneer family travels west by covered wagon to find gold and free land in California, the parents and two children nurture a red flower from their old home to plant on the new land. Despite all the hardships they encounter on their journey, the family and Red Flower survive.

Wells, Rosemary. **Streets of Gold.** Illustrated by Dan Andreason. Dial, 1999, 39 pp. \$15.99. ISBN: 0-8037-2149-8. **A**, *Picture book, American history, Immigrant family, Courage.* Wells has shortened and simplified a poignant memoir published in the early 20th century by immigrant Mary Antin, who came here from Russia with her family when she was twelve. Some of Mary's original words, which appear in the margin of every page of the story, and the oil paintings in this memorable book help readers understand the many contrasts between Mary's European home and her American one.

THE ARTS HUMANIZE CIVILIZATION

Drucker, Malka. **The Sea Monster's Secret.**

Illustrated by Christopher Aja. Gulliver Books/Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999. 30 pp. \$16.00. ISBN: 0-15-200619-2. **M-O**, *Folktale, Tlingit and Haida Indians, Being Proactive*. Continually criticized by his bride's mother, a young man decides to kill a sea monster the village fears. He succeeds and discovers the skin is magical when worn so begins a series of sea hunts. Each morning he lays larger and larger catches at his mother-in-law's door. She claims her magic brings these gifts to the villagers. Eventually her lie is uncovered in this mysterious totem-inspired tale.

Kimmel, Eric A. **The Birds' Gift: A Ukrainian Easter Story**. Illustrated by Katya Krenia. Holiday House, 1999. Unpaged. \$16.95. ISBN: 0-8234-1384-5. **P-M**, *Folk literature, Easter, Kindness, Cooperation*. Katrusya discovers several flocks of birds half-frozen under the snow. She and other villagers rescue them, but toward spring the birds fly against the windows to be free. At Easter the children find special eggs, called pysanky, a thank you from the birds.

Kross, Virginia. **Faraway Drums**. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. Little Brown & Co., 1998. Unpaged. \$14.95. ISBN: 0-316-50449-1. **P-O**, *Contemporary realistic fiction, African Americans, Accepting adult responsibility, Storytelling, Overcoming fears*. Jamila takes care of her sister after school and into the night while her mother works. They have just moved to a different apartment, and Jamila has to rely on the stories her grandmother told her about Africa to help her overcome her fears and those of her little sister by imagining the drums of her ancestors.

McPhail, David. **Mole Music**. Illustrated by author. Henry Hold and Co., 1999. Unpaged. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-8050-2819-6. **P-A**, *Fiction, Moles, Violin, Peace, the Arts*. Mole's couch potato existence is changed forever when a man on TV plays a violin and Mole decides that he'll send away for one. With practice, Mole gets better and better, and as he grows happier and happier underground, people's hearts change above ground, and anger and sadness melt away into beauty and peace.

Norman, Howard. **Trickster and the Fainting Birds**. Illustrated by Tom Pohrt. Gulliver Books/Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999, 82 pp. \$20.00. ISBN: 0-15-200888-8. **M-O**, *Folktales, Cree and Ojibwa Indians, Humor, Connections to Nature, Ingenu-*

ity. In this beautifully illustrated collection of seven Algonquin tales, the mischief-making Trickster creates a variety of problems others solve through imagination, wit, and teamwork. Among other things, crows prove Trickster is not the best hermit, ducks learn to do "shut-eye dances," and villagers prove love is stronger than his intimidation. Laughter and lessons learned for the onlookers, and the reader, result. The author's *Introduction* and *Story Notes* tell the fascinating story of how these oral stories moved to verse in print.

Poole, Amy Lowry. **How the Rooster Got His Crown**. Illustrated by author. Holiday House, 1999. Unpaged. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-8234-1389-6. **P-M**, *Folk literature, China, Weather, Animals*. The emperor of China is afraid his people will starve because the rains have not come and six suns are burning up the crops. To remedy the situation, he calls upon the best archers to shoot five of the suns out of the sky. Five Chinese symbols, allegedly representing the five suns who disappeared, are woven into the story through clothing, water, sky, and landscape.

Tarpley, Natasha Anastasia. **I Love My Hair**. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. Little Brown & Co., 1998. Unpaged. \$14.95. ISBN: 0-316-52275-0. **P-M**, *Contemporary realistic fiction, Hair, African American, Mother-daughter relations, Self-esteem*. Fresh and inviting similes describe the hair of the protagonist, who comes to like her hair and be proud of it. The time spent with her mother who combed and styled it for her help improve her self-esteem and develop a close bond between them.

CHARACTER BUILDING

Barron, David. **The Adventures of Bob and Red**. Illustrated by author. Landmark Editions, 1999. 29 pp. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-933849-71-0. **A**, *Fantasy, Adventure, Personification, Friendships, Being proactive, Automobile restoration, Published students*. When Bob the truck and Red the tractor learn that their fate is to become scrap metal, they escape from the junk yard, beginning a suspenseful, fast-paced, humorous, and heartwarming adventure. The story and the author/illustrator (as described in the foreword), a 9-year-old winner of the National Written and Illustrated by ... Awards Contest, demonstrate the importance of determination and perseverance.

Brokaw, Nancy Steele. **Leaving Emma**. Clarion,

1999. 157 pp. \$15.00. ISBN: 0-395-90699-7. **M-O**, *Best friends, Self-reliance, Family life, Change*. Wanting her life “solid” and “orderly as an outline,” Emma thinks her world has fallen apart when her life rollercoasters into a series of changes when her best friend moves, her parents go to Turkey, and Great-Aunt Grace comes to stay. Amid typical kid-like situations, realistic dialogue, and inner thoughts that metaphorically articulate adolescent emotions, Emma’s transformation evolves through involvement in a school musical and the development of comfortable rituals with her Great Aunt. She is able to help her mom accept changes too.

McCully, Emily Arnold. **Mouse Practice**. Illustrated by author. Arthur A. Levine Books, 1999, Unpaged. \$15.95. ISBN: 0-590-68220-2. **P**, *Baseball, Perseverance*. Monk wants to play baseball with the older boys, but he’s not very good. His parents, who are musical but not very athletic, help him devise strategies for getting better. So, while his parents and their musician friends practice their music, Monk also practices. In the end, practice pays off for everyone, including Monk’s mother, who literally goes out on a limb for her son.

Namioka, Lensey. **Ties That Bind, Ties That Break**. Delacorte, 1999. 154 pp. \$15.05. ISBN: 0-385-32666-1. **O**, *China, Fiction, Chinese-Americans, Gender roles, Breaking traditions, Rebellion, Life Journey*. Strong characterization and a fast-paced narrative mark the story of Tao Ailin, who at age five had been promised in marriage to Hanwei, but the arrangement was broken off when young Ailin refused to have her feet bound. As an adult, married to a restaurant proprietor in America, Ailin again meets Hanwei, and she traces the story of her life and the many ways she broke with the traditions of upper-class Chinese society by rebelling openly against her elders, going to a public school, learning English, and earning her own living.

Peck, Richard. **A Long Way from Chicago**. Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998. 148 pp. \$15.99. ISBN: 0-8037-2290-7. **M-O**, *Historical fiction, Grandmothers, Depression, Country life, History, Being Proactive*. Each summer when Joey and Mary Alice visit their grandmother in a small town in Illinois, their grandmother surprises them with adventures. Granny is a master at outsmarting others and getting what she wants.

Stevens, Janet and Crummel, Susan Stevens. **Cook-A-Doodle-Do!** Illustrated by Janet Stevens.

Harcourt Brace, 1999. Unpaged. \$17.00. ISBN: 0-15-201924-3. **P**, *Picture book, Animals, Cooking, Determination, Humor*. Big Brown Rooster uses the cookbook written by his great-grandmother, *The Joy of Cooking Alone*, to attempt a dessert with the questionable help of his friends Turtle, Iguana, and Potbellied Fig. None of the four can cook, but all are enthusiastic about trying. Finally they make “the most wonderful, magnificent strawberry shortcake in the whole wide world,” served with plenty of humor and some mouth-watering pictures.

Taylor, Harriet Peck. **Two Days in May**. Illustrated by Leyla Torres. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Unpaged. \$16.00. ISBN: 0-374-37988-2. **P-M**, *Contemporary realistic fiction, Deer, Neighbors, Wildlife rescue*. A young girl’s garden becomes the scene of a peaceful protest and wildlife rescue when deer wander into the city looking for food and the neighbors band together to prevent the animal control officer from shooting them. A satisfying resolution concludes this story based on a real incident in Chicago in 1996.

Van West, Patricia E. **The Crab Man**. Illustrated by Cedric Lucas. Turtle Books, 1998. Unpaged. \$15.95. ISBN: 1-890515-08-6. **P-O**, *Contemporary realistic fiction, Hermit crabs, Mistreating animals, Jamaica, Poverty, Ethical decisions*. Neville collects six hermit crabs daily to sell to the crab man for a US dollar because he needs money to buy a dress for his mother. When he learns how the crabs are being used, he refuses to sell any more crabs, even though it means he can’t buy the dress. Endnotes provide information about Jamaica and hermit crabs.

Yang, Belle. **Chili-Chili-Chin-Chin**. Illustrated by author. Silver Whistle/Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999. 30 pp. \$15.00. ISBN: 0-15-202006-3. **P**, *Fiction, Friendship, China, Connections to Nature*. “Chili-Chili-Chin-Chin I am,” sings out the Manchurian donkey in this delightful tale of a special friendship celebrated with vibrant, fanciful illustrations. He sprints away from all who want to domesticate him but rushes across the Chinese countryside towards the boy who named him. With this friend he enjoys finding blossoms in the spring, watching turtles swim in the summer, and-most important-being himself.

REFERENCE

Banks and Banks, Eds. (1989). **Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives**. NY: Allyn and Bacon, p. 328.