Association of Children’s Librarians of Northern California

Distinguished Books

2008
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Titles have been selected from those reviewed in BayViews for their outstanding literary merit, high quality of illustration and design, and contribution to a child’s understanding of the world.
Association of Children’s Librarians
of Northern California
P. O. Box 12471, Berkeley, CA 94712
www.bayviews.org

ACL has been serving librarians, teachers, and booksellers in Northern California since the 1930s. Members meet monthly to review books for young people and discuss related issues. ACL’s book review journal, BayViews, is published 11 times a year.

Membership in ACL offers:

- subscription to BayViews, which prints reviews of more than 1,800 new books each year
- annual annotated Distinguished Books list
- opportunity to review and discuss current children’s books
- special bibliographies
- notices of job opportunities
- opportunity to discuss current issues in library service to children
- discounted attendance at the annual Performers’ Showcase
- discounted attendance at the annual Institute
- professional development and networking opportunities

Meetings are held from 9 a.m. to noon on the second Friday of each month, excluding the month of the annual Institute, at an area library. Check the website for meeting locations. In the Spring, ACL sponsors an Institute about library service to children and topics of interest to librarians and teachers.

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Acknowledgements

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Grade designations in the annotations are approximate.

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The Distinguished Books Committee for 2008 was chaired by:

Claire Sue, Benicia Public Library
Eric Barbus, San Francisco Public Library

ACL Distinguished Books (2008) is published by the Association of Children’s Librarians of Northern California. Members of ACL receive a free copy. Additional copies are available for $5 each (including postage). Make checks payable to the Association of Children’s Librarians and send order to:

ACL Distinguished Books, P. O. Box 12471, Berkeley, CA 94712.

Non-Fiction

Anderson, Laurie Halse
Independent Dames: What You Never Knew About the Women and Girls of the American Revolution
Illus. by Matt Faulkner
Simon & Schuster, 2008 $16.99 Grades 4-7
Over a hundred women who played roles in the Revolutionary War are brought to light in this superbly researched volume. Detailed illustrations, cartoon bubble asides, and a large picture book format make the information very entertaining.

Campbell, Sarah C.
Wolfsnail—a Backyard Predator
Photographs by Sarah C. and Richard P. Campbell
Boyds Mills, 2008 $16.95 Grades K-5
Simple and clear but intriguing sentences grace a non-fiction book about the carnivorous Rosy Wolfsnail. Amazing photographs and fascinating text provide exemplary science writing for the youngest readers. Winner of a 2009 ALA Theodore Seuss Geisel Honor Award.

Fradin, Judy and Dennis
Droughts: Witness to Disaster
Hurricanes: Witness to Disaster
Tsunamis: Witness to Disaster
National Geographic, 2007/2008 $16.95 Grades 3-8
The weaving together of eyewitness accounts of recent disasters with clear scientific explanations makes this series useful for both reports and browsing. The wealth of color photos, diagrams, and maps will draw in even reluctant readers.

Frost, Helen
Monarch and Milkweed
Monarch and Milkweed
Illus. by Leonid Gore
Enhanced with dappled, textured illustrations, this exquisite and awe-inspiring picture book weaves together the interconnected life cycles of the monarch butterfly and the milkweed plant.
In a twist of fate, two boyhood friends, who gave donkey rides to vacationers, meet in Turkey during World War I as Jack’s donkey, Duffy, helps save his wounded friend. Jack Simpson and Duffy saved many other lives in this true story of courage.

Nelson, Kadir
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball
Illus. by the author
Hyperion, 2008 $18.99 Grades 5-10
A tour de force by Kadir Nelson who provides both the elegant writing and the stunning paintings for a history of the Negro Baseball League told in 9 innings. Interesting portraits of many players are accented with anecdotes and facts galore.

Nelson, Scott Reynolds with Marc Aronson
Ain’t Nothing But a Man: My Quest to Find the Real John Henry
National Geographic, 2008 $18.95 Grades 5-7
Adapted from his adult book on the same topic (Steel Drivin’ Man: The Untold Story of an American Legend, 2006), Nelson searches for the truth behind the folk song legend John Henry. Period photos and other illustrative material bring the text to life.

Rappaport, Doreen
Lady Liberty: A Biography
Illus. by Matt Tavares
Candlewick, 2008 $17.99 Grades 3-6
Accompanied by majestic illustrations of “Lady Liberty,” famous and ordinary historical figures describe their roles in the creation, installation, and dedication of the Statue of Liberty.

Schulman, Janet
Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City
Illus. by Meilo So
Knopf, 2008 $16.99/$19.99 Grades 4-6
Author and illustrator share with readers the biography of red-tailed hawk, Pale Male, and his family, in a lively and accurate story that avoids anthropomorphism. So’s vibrant watercolors and Schulman’s lively words should make readers friends of these symbolic hawks.
Rohmann, Eric
*A Kitten Tale*
Illus. by the author
Knopf, 2008 $15.99 Grades Pre-K
While one adventurous kitten is looking forward to the coming winter, three others are wary of the wet and cold. These scaredy-cats’ fears are assuaged, however, after seeing the bold kitten having fun in the first winter snow.

Rumford, James
*Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad*
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook, 2008 $17.95 Grades 3-6
Growing up in contemporary Baghdad, Ali loves soccer, dancing, loud music, and the flow of calligraphy from his pen, even as he struggles, in the midst of war, to write “Salam,” the word for peace.

Seeger, Laura Vaccaro
*Dog and Bear: Two’s Company*
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook, 2008 $12.95 Grades Pre-2
Dog and Bear are back again as engaging as ever. In three short stories, Seeger deals with running away, sickness, and birthdays. The illustrations add to the warmth and intimacy of the book.

Seeger, Laura Vaccaro
*One Boy*
Illus. by author
Roaring Brook, 2008 $14.95 Grades Pre-1
Ms. Seeger combines learning numbers with word recognition and uses her signature die cuts in this picture book.

Shulevitz, Uri
*How I Learned Geography*
Illus. by the author
Farrar, 2008 $16.95 Grades K-5
In this autobiographical tale, a young boy living in a small house in the desert envisions himself in colorful and wondrous places around the world when his father brings home a map instead of food for his hungry family.

Winters, Kay
*Colonial Voices: Hear Them Speak*
Illus. by Larry Day
Penguin, 2008 $17.99 Grades 3-6
Ethan runs through Boston the day before the Boston Tea Party delivering the message that there will be a meeting at South Church that night. Each of the tradesmen he visits has a story to tell.

**Biography**

Bryant, Jen
*A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams*
Illus. by Melissa Sweet
Eerdmans, 2008 $17.00 Grades 2-5
An engaging picture book biography and Caldecott Honor that will introduce children to the doctor poet Williams, this also includes several of his poems on the endpapers and within the text.

Fleischman, Sid
*The Trouble Begins at 8: A Life of Mark Twain in the Wild, Wild West*
HarperCollins, 2008 $19.89 Grades 5-9
Written with tongue firmly in cheek, Fleischman’s biography of Mark Twain when he was Samuel Clemens, is a rollicking visit with this beloved author during his childhood and young adult years.

Fleming, Candace
*The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary*
Schwartz & Wade, 2008 $24.99 Grades 5-Adult
A “scrapbook” format gives a fresh look to a biography of Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd. Told in alternating chapters, the lives of Abraham and Mary come alive with primary source materials including photographs and anecdotes.

Halfmann, Janet
*Seven Miles to Freedom: The Robert Smalls Story*
Illus. by Duane Smith
Lee & Low, 2008 $17.95 Grades 3-6
Slave Robert Smalls commandeers a Confederate supply ship and pilots himself, his family, and 12 other slaves through perilous waters to freedom in a suspenseful true account.
Scieszka, Jon
Knucklehead
Viking, 2008 $16.99 Grades 3-6
The hilarious memoir of the noted author is filled with family photos and toy advertisements. Not just nostalgic, kids can relate to the pranks, rough housing, and general mayhem a houseful of six boys can perpetrate on their loving but exasperated parents.

Graphic Novels

Holm, Jennifer
Babymouse: Volume 7: Skater Girl
Illus. by Matthew Holm
Random, 2007 $12.99 Grades 3-6
Babymouse plans on becoming a competitive figure-skater until the demands of a draconian coach and an overwhelming training schedule force her to reconsider. The clever little mouse’s wry thoughts, grandiose dreams, and wacky sensibilities keep readers amused.

Fiction

Almond, David
My Dad’s a Birdman
Illus. by Polly Dunbar
Candlewick, 2008 $15.99 Grades 2-5
Following her mother’s death, Lizzie spends time helping her father prepare for the Great Human Bird Competition. While he’s assembled a costume and started eating worms, it is Lizzie who is the voice of reason.

Anderson, Laurie Halse
Chains: Seeds of America
Simon & Schuster, 2008 $16.99 Grades 5-10
Isabel, a 13-year-old slave girl, faces difficult choices and an uncertain future as she weighs the price of freedom. Set in New York during the American Revolution, this well-researched novel features compelling characters and well-paced action.

Kelley, Marty
Twelve Terrible Things
Illus. by the author
Tricycle, 2008 $15.99 Grades 1-4
Readers are warned at the beginning of this humorous book they are going to see some terrible things. From a first-person perspective, realistic illustrations show situations that range from unpleasant to downright awful.

Kohara, Kazuno
Ghosts in the House!
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook, 2008 $12.95 Grades Pre-1
A young girl catches all of the ghosts in a house, washes them, and then repurposes them into drapes, bedsheets, and the like. Simple black block prints and translucent white ghosts on a solid orange background complement this amusing ghost story.

Lee, Suzy
Wave
Illus. by the author
Chronicle, 2008 $15.99 Grades Pre-3
Simple and stunning, with a masterful use of the book gutter, this wordless tale rendered in black, white, gray, and blue shows a day at the beach where a little girl gets acquainted with the ocean.

Nakagawa, Chihiro
Who Made This Cake?
Illus. by Junji Koyose
Front Street/Boyds Mills, 2008 $16.95 Grades Tod-Pre
Following a mother’s telephone order, dozens of workers use a variety of construction vehicles to build a cake for a child’s birthday.

Nyeu, Tao
Wonder Bear
Illus. by the author
Dial, 2008 $17.99 Grades Pre-2
Seeds sown by a young boy and girl erupt into a flourishing vine from whose blooms appear a top-hatted bear that releases a buoyant extravaganza of activity and creatures. Wordless, vibrant, and psychedelic.
Gravett, Emily  
*Little Mouse’s Big Book of Fears*  
Illus. by the author  
This is a cleverly designed scrapbook, of sorts, chronicling the things that a mouse fears, told with newspaper articles, a map, “photos,” flaps, sketches, and nibbled pages.

Gravett, Emily  
*Monkey and Me*  
Illus. by the author  
Simon & Schuster, 2008 $15.99 Grades Pre-K  
A young girl bounces with her stuffed monkey across double-paged spreads imitating the motions of an animal that the reader is encouraged to guess before the page turns.

Hayes, Sarah  
*Dog Day*  
Illus. by Hannah Broadway  
Farrar, 2008 $16.95 Grades Pre-3  
Watch Riff. Watch the children. Watch the teacher. Whoops—Riff IS the teacher for one glorious day. As the class watches the teacher, each child imitates what Riff does: Riff wags his tail, the children wag their bottoms; Riff barks, the children bark. What a good dog-human romp.

Hines, Anna Grossnickle  
*1, 2, Buckle My Shoe*  
Illus. by the author  
Harcourt, 2008 $16.00 Grades Tod-Pre  
The traditional rhyme receives a lively treatment here. Hines’s clever needlework and vibrant color are used to display stitched numbers, the appropriate number of buttons, and panels showing the activities that end each rhyme.

Hopkinson, Deborah  
*Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale*  
(Introducing His Forgotten Frontier Friend)  
Illus. by John Hendrix  
Schwartz & Wade, 2008 $16.99 Grades 3-5  
Only a friend’s swift thinking saves the future president from drowning when he falls into a creek. The story deftly raises the question of where fact ends and tall tale begins through a seamless blend of narrative, author asides, and watercolor drawings.

Anderson, M. T.  
*The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation: Volume II, The Kingdom on the Waves*  
Candlewick, 2008 $22.99 Grades 8-Adult  
Octavian Nothing’s travels and travails continue as he seeks his freedom in the Royal Ethiopian Regiment. Octavian’s story, along with the tales of his comrades, is complex and will resonate with the reader.

Appelt, Kathi.  
*The Underneath*  
Illus. by David Small  
Atheneum, 2008 $16.99 Grades 5-9  
Set in the bayou and following its meandering way, *The Underneath* tells a story of imprisonment, both physical and mental, and how the characters, young, old, damaged and innocent, are released. The story, full of magic and myth, is also full of cruelty and venom.

Baker, Deirdre  
*Becca at Sea*  
Groundwood, 2007 $16.95 Grades 4-6  
Becca dreads spending time alone with Gran at her rustic cabin but soon finds adventures aplenty, like a kiss from a seal and skinny-dipping in the luminescent sea.

Bailiott, Blue  
*The Calder Game*  
Illus. by Brett Helquist  
Scholastic, 2008 $17.99 Grades 4-8  
After Calder disappears while visiting England with his father, Calder’s friends Petra and Tommy fly over to help to find him. Sculptures by Calder’s namesake, shadowy photographers, and a small English town add to the mystery.

Collins, Suzanne  
*The Hunger Games*  
Scholastic, 2008 $17.99 Grades 8-12  
In a chilling and plausible dystopian world, all teens are possible candidates for “the Hunger Games,” a contest in which 24, chosen by lottery, will compete, but only one will survive.
Cowley, Joy
*Chicken Feathers*
Illus. by David Elliot
Philomel/Putnam, 2008 $15.99 Grades 3-5
In a funny, tender transitional story, Josh confides in his pet chicken, Semolina, a sassy hen with a weakness for beer, who warns him of a fox who steals their eggs and wants to kill her.

Dowd, Siobhan
*The London Eye Mystery*
Fickling/Random, 2008 $15.99 Grades 5-8
When his cousin Salim mysteriously disappears, Ted’s “differently wired” brain sorts through the baffling pieces of the puzzle and solves the mystery in a story that will keep readers guessing.

Fern, Tracey E.
*Buffalo Music*
Illus. by Lauren Castillo
Clarion, 2008 $16.00 Grades K-4
Molly loves the “music” of the buffalo, but soon hunters come and buffalo music is gone. Then Molly is given some orphaned calves that she cares for and coaxes a few onto a train to Yellowstone.

Gaiman, Neil
*The Graveyard Book*
Illus. by Dave McKean
HarperCollins, 2008 $17.99 Grades 4-9
After an off-screen macabre opening, Gaiman writes a peon to family, community, and love. Orphan Nobody Owen toddles into the local cemetery where he is embraced and raised by its intriguing crew of dead inhabitants.

Green, John
*Paper Towns*
Dutton/Penguin, 2008 $17.99 Grades 8-12
Quentin (“Q”) is visited in the middle of the night by uber-popular Margo Roth Spiegelman who enlists him to help her pull off some pranks. The next day Margo disappears, and Q follows clues in an effort to find her.

Brannen, Sarah S.
*Uncle Bobby’s Wedding*
Illus. by the author
Putnam, 2008 $15.99 Grades K-3
Chloe is worried about losing the attention of her favorite uncle, who is about to be married. Although it will be clear to adults that Uncle Bobby is marrying another man, young children will identify with Chloe. The hamsters dressed as humans are portrayed sweetly in the watercolor illustrations, and the message of accepting gay marriage is timely, yet subtly accomplished.

Browne, Anthony
*Little Beauty*
Illus. by the author
Candlewick, 2008 $16.99 Grades K-1
Expressively done in pencil and watercolor, a gorilla in the zoo who knows sign language lets his keepers know that he is sad and is thus given a kitten as a friend. Stunning and subtly layered.

Cate, Annette LeBlanc
*The Magic Rabbit*
Illus. by the author
Candlewick, 2007 $15.99 Grades Pre-1
Street magician Ray and his bunny assistant are the best of friends. One day Bunny is lost in the big city and Ray must find him in a whimsical tale of sudden loss and joyful rediscovery.

Fox, Mem
*Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes*
Illus. by Helen Oxenbury
Harcourt, 2008 $16.00 Grades Tod-Pre
Fox’s very short, sweet rhyme accompanies Oxenbury’s happy, chubby babies of a variety of ethnicities and without gender references, making for a book with wide appeal. Perfect for baby storytimes.

Frazee, Marla
*A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever*
Illus. by the author
Harcourt, 2008 $16.00 Grades K-3
Grandparents Bill and Pam devise a well-planned nature week for their young grandson Eamon and his friend James. While Bill tries to interest the boys in the outdoors or a museum exhibit, the boys, in the end, discover nature on their own terms.
Wong, Janet S.
Minn and Jake’s Almost Terrible Summer
Illus. by Geneviève Côté,
Frances Foster/Farrar, 2008 $15.00 Grades 3-5
In this free-verse, early chapter book, we hear the story of Jake, who is half-Korean and half-German, and his best friend, Minn. Various misunderstandings ensue between the two friends when Jake visits the Korean side of his family in L.A.

Woo, Don
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Woodson, Jacqueline
After Tupac and D Foster
Putnam, 2008 $15.99 Grades 5-8
Three adolescent girls growing up in Queens, NY, bond through the rap music of their idol, Tupac Shakur. Issues of racism, homophobia, and injustice are sensitively raised in this thoughtful coming-of-age story.

Readers

Willems, Mo
Are You Ready to Play Outside?
I Love My New Toy
Illus. by the author
Two new entries in this series of very easy readers are as refreshingly humorous as ever. Gerald the Elephant and Piggie the Pig play, exhibiting common childhood friendship challenges, while the book design combines dialogue balloons with Willems’ pastel cartoons set on white backgrounds.

Picture Books

Amato, Mary
The Chicken of the Family
Illus. by Delphine Durand
Putnam $16.99 Grades Pre-3
After her older sisters persuade her that she is a chicken, Henrietta finds joy and companionship among the hens. She then turns the tables on her sisters in a witty, delightful way.

Headley, Justina Chen
Girl Overboard
Little, 2008 $16.99 Grades 8-Adult
After aspiring snowboarder Syrah injures her knee, she struggles to gain recognition and respect from her high achieving, emotionally absent family. Teens will enjoy this coming-of-age story.

Hooper, Mary
Newes of the Dead
Roaring Brook, 2008 $16.95 Grades 8-12
Based on a true story, Anne, a servant girl, is hanged for killing her newborn baby and then wakes up on the doctor’s table just before scholars begin dissecting her body. Historical information of Cromwell’s England is gracefully woven into the dramatic story that blends the macabre with romance.

Horvath, Polly
My One Hundred Adventures
Schwartz & Wade, 2008 $16.99 Grades 4-8
Over the course of a summer on the beach, Jane throws bibles out of a hijacked hot-air balloon, babysits out of guilt, and watches her mother interact with three different men, one of whom is likely her father.

Lawrence, Iain
The Castaways
Delacorte, 2007 $15.99 Grades 5-12
Tom Tin and his convict mates board a deserted ship and rescue some unsavory sailors who plot to kill Tom and sell his friends into slavery. All ends well as Tom sails the ship to England.

Lockhart, E.
The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks: A Novel
Hyperion, 2008 $16.99 Grades 9-12
Frankie is frustrated that her boyfriend refuses to tell her anything about his secrets. Her subversive infiltration of his exclusive school society, The Loyal Order of the Basset Hound, shows her progression from wallflower to mastermind.
Alvin Ho: Allergic to Girls and Other Scary Things
Illus. by LeUyen Pham
Schwartz & Wade, 2008 $15.99 Grades 2-4
Alvin Ho would like to be a superhero, but his fears keep getting in the way. Chinese-American Alvin deals with a chicken pox outbreak, taking piano lessons from a witch-like teacher, and suffering through a session with a psychotherapist.

Prey
Delacorte, 2008 $10.99 Grades 8-Adult
McDaniel’s cautionary tale about a student-teacher affair is told in three distinct voices. The student-teacher relationship is more ambiguous than in many other books: in the end, who is the prey?

Chalice
Putnam, 2008 $18.99 Grades 5-12
McKinley once has again has created an engaging, surprising, and oddly realistic fantasy world, Woodland, with a heroine to match in Mirasol.

What They Found: Love on 145th Street
Wendy Lamb/Random, 2007 $15.99 Grades 8-12
Myers returns to 145th Street in this new collection of short stories to explore variations on the theme of love from teenagers to older adults with humor, compassion, and great understanding.

The Dead and the Gone
Harcourt, 2008 $17.00 Grades 6-12
Seventeen-year-old Alex and his two sisters are forced to live alone through the ensuing devastation in New York after a meteor has hit the moon, knocking it out of its normal orbit.

Living Dead Girl
Simon Pulse, 2008 $16.99 Grades 10-12
Alice, a “living dead girl” who has been abducted and abused, becomes complicit in her captor’s plot to steal another young girl. Scott’s economy of language makes this harrowing tale compelling.

My Swordhand Is Singing
Wendy Lamb/Random, 2007 $15.99 Grades 6-8
In a 17th century Eastern European village, Peter, son of woodcutter Tomas, joins forces with a gypsy girl to stop the Shadow Queen’s murders and reanimations. Can Tomas and what is in his strange box fend her off?

The Mysterious Benedict Society
Illus. by Carson Ellis
Little, 2007 $16.99 Grades 6-8
Four children work together to save the world in this over-the-top adventure. Clever wordplay, quirky characters, and a fast-paced plot make this certain to hold the interest of readers.

A Crooked Kind of Perfect
Harcourt, 2007 $16.00 Grades 4-7
Zoe longs to play the piano but is given an organ by her well-meaning, but clueless and agoraphobic, stay-at-home dad. Helped by her friend Wheeler, Zoe enters a talent show hoping to get the attention of her workaholic mom.

It’s Only Temporary
Illus. by the author
Viking, 2008 $15.99 Grades 4-6
After her brother’s car accident, 12-year-old Skye is sent to live with her grandmother in New Mexico. Her drawings, diary notes, and e-mail messages enliven the text in this compelling story of love, loyalty, and forgiveness.

The Aurora County All-Stars
Harcourt, 2007 $16.00 Grades 4-7
With her distinctive Southern voice, Wiles brings to life House Jackson, pitcher for the local youth baseball team who is recovering from a broken arm. Weaving bits of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass into the exciting plot and featuring quirky characters, this novel of one summer vacation is unique and memorable.