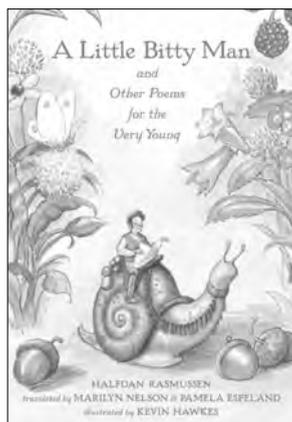




## 2011 Notable Poetry Books

*Jonda C. McNair, Alan R. Bailey, Lesley Colabucci,  
and Deanna Day*

This column presents what we consider to be the best poetry books published in 2011. The 10 featured titles address a range of topics, from the easily relatable—hot dogs, ice-cream cones, socks, and crayons—to the relationship between two sisters, peace, and the moon. In addition to the poetry books, we have included a biography of Pablo Neruda, the famous Chilean poet who was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. These books feature a range of poetic forms, including free verse, haiku, and narrative. It is our hope that teachers and children will enjoy reading these notable poetry books.

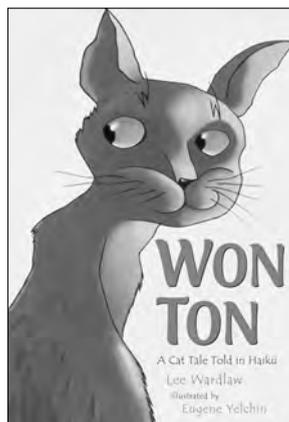


***A Little Bitty Man  
and Other Poems  
for the Very Young***  
*Written by Halfdan  
Rasmussen; Translated by  
Marilyn Nelson & Pamela  
Espeland; Illustrated by  
Kevin Hawkes*  
Candlewick Press, 2011,  
29 pp., ISBN 978-0-7636-  
2379-1

Expertly translated  
into English from  
the works of Halfdan

Rasmussen, a Danish poet, this witty and charming collection of poems will produce years of endless amusement for children of many ages. From the little bitty man living in a little bitty world, a frog who is amazed that a ball can “hop” without feet, an elf who cleverly uses an ice cream cone to warm his nose, the simplicity of war from a child’s perspective, an unscientific explanation of

summer showers, to the last trick played by three mischievous boys, readers will laugh out loud and enjoy the humor and precise rhythms and rhymes used to comprise each of the 13 poems. Complemented by spirited and expressive acrylic and charcoal pencil illustrations, these poems, quite reminiscent of nursery rhymes, are destined to be favorites of youngsters ages 3–8. (AB)



***Won Ton: A Cat  
Tale Told in Haiku***  
*Written by Lee Wardlaw;  
Illustrated by Eugene  
Yelchin*  
Henry Holt, 2011,  
unpaged, ISBN 978-0-  
8050-8995-0

This amusing story  
chronicles the  
adoption of Won Ton,  
a Siamese shelter  
cat with dark blue  
fur, from living in a

lonely cage at the shelter to settling into his new home with a loving family. Chosen by a little boy who “rubs his chin just right,” this self-proclaimed Oriental prince temporarily accepts the name given to him, begrudgingly eats the food in his dish, uses a sneaker for a litter box, uses the couch as a scratching post, tips over lamps while chasing flies, and snacks on crickets, mice, and moths while exploring the yard. Yelchin’s bold and expressive graphite and gouache on watercolor paper illustrations are perfect companions to Wardlaw’s memorable tale that captures the true essence of

this snobbish, sarcastic, mischievous, nonchalant, yet loving cat. *Won Ton* is told in a series of more than 30 senryu—a Japanese poetry form developed from haiku focusing on the eccentricities of human nature. Front matter includes an author's note detailing the composition of senryu and haiku. Additionally, a detailed teacher's guide, comprised of a discussion guide, subject-based activities (reading, writing, math, art, and science), a guide to writing haiku, and suggestions for performing community service projects, is available on the author's website ([www.leewardlaw.com](http://www.leewardlaw.com)). (AB)

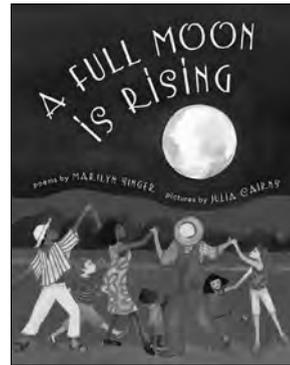


***Dear Hot Dog:  
Poems about  
Everyday Stuff***

*Written and illustrated  
by Mordicai Gerstein*  
Abrams Books for  
Young Readers, 2011,  
unpaged, ISBN 978-0-  
8109-9732-5

This collection features 22 poems that celebrate the joy in commonplace things and experiences. Throughout the book, the poet personifies or even directly addresses such objects as toothbrushes, bowls, books, and spaghetti. The child's perspective is featured through the energy and enthusiasm that permeates each individual poem. There is a sense of discovery and pure joy that pervades these reflections on often taken-for-granted objects. Scissors are "a funny bird," while shoes "swallow my feet." The use of figurative language and other forms of language play will entertain and amuse a wide range of readers. Each poem has its own illustration, rendered in acrylics with plenty of scribbly lines and hatch-work to add to the overall playfulness of the book. The characters featured throughout offer friendly and varied faces (gender balanced and multicultural). The illustrations further contribute to the overall reading experience by switching perspective and viewpoints. At times,

the reader needs to turn the book vertically; page layouts alternate between single and double-page spreads; and the poet at times uses shape to convey meaning (especially in "Bowl," "Sun," and "Water"). The combination of these factors makes for a highly literary collection, one that will lend itself to recitation as well as imitation. (LC)



***A Full Moon  
Is Rising***

*Written by Marilyn  
Singer; Illustrated by  
Julia Cairns*  
Lee & Low Books, 2011,  
unpaged, ISBN 978-1-  
60060-364-8

All around the world, people and other living things are affected by the changing phases of the moon. In this picturebook, readers will take a lunar journey discovering full moon customs, beliefs, and celebrations through poetry. Realistic watercolor illustrations accompany 17 poems that focus on India, Israel, Morocco, China, Australia, and more. For example, in the Bay of Fundy, Canada, readers learn about the world's highest tides during a full moon: "One hundred billion tonnes of water / in and out the bay." When there is a lunar eclipse in Mali, some people believe they need to bring back the moon by banging on pots and pans and beating on drums. "Bang the pot, beat the drum. / Bring back the moon!" If they don't, the moon will not return on its own, and it will take the sun with it. In Broome, Australia, there is a natural phenomenon called the staircase to the moon. When a full moon shines on the mudflats, it creates the image of a glowing magic staircase to the moon. The book includes extensive back matter, including information about each location and poem. The copyright page lists the author's sources and the end pages show a map of the Earth, noting each country. (DD)

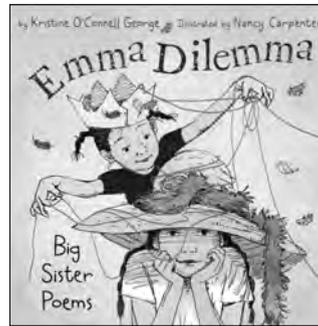


***Peaceful Pieces:  
Poems and Quilts  
about Peace***

Written and illustrated  
by Anna Grossnickle  
Hines  
Henry Holt, 2011,  
unpaged, ISBN 978-0-  
8050-8996-7

Completely  
illustrated in  
handmade quilts,  
this poetry

book explores peace in all of its countless and unexpected forms—peace between families, peace between ourselves, and peace within our world. For example, in the poem “Sure Cure,” two siblings are not getting along. Mom interjects, ““Stop this bickering / before it comes to blows.’ / She made us stand together / touching nose to nose.” Eventually brother and sister feel rather silly and begin giggling, thus peacefully ending their fight. Another poem reminds us how easily anger flares, “It’s only thoughts— / your own thoughts— / that keep rewinding, / repeating, replaying, / recharging, / refiring chemicals / that keep the anger / thrashing over / and over.” This list poem compels readers to peacefully “Breathe in. / Out. / Let them go.” Another poem shares how each of us is connected like dominoes, “one to / another / to another.” It concludes that “whatever / happens to / one of us / happens / to / all / of / us.” The book closes with information on peacemakers in our world, such as Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa. Hines then shares how she was part of a writing and quilting community that helped her create the poems and quilts. She includes photographs of her studio and the beginning stages of the front cover quilt. (DD)



***Emma  
Dilemma: Big  
Sister Poems***

Written by Kristine  
O'Connell George;  
Illustrated by Nancy  
Carpenter  
Clarion Books, 2011,  
47 pp., ISBN 978-0-  
618-42842-7

This collection features 34 poems that focus on the relationship between two sisters named Jessica and Emma. Jessica is the older sister and the poems are told from her viewpoint. The poems are free verse and written in narrative form while focusing on numerous aspects of the girls' lives, such as attending soccer games, rock collecting, reading picturebooks together, and sharing. My favorite poem is titled “Emma’s Hand” and it reads, “Emma’s hand is / just the right size / to fit / inside mine. / Emma’s hand is / warm / soft / friendly / sticky.” Another poem, “Emma Dilemma,” from which the book gets its title, reads, “Sometimes Dad / calls my little sister / Emma Dilemma. / Dad says / a dilemma is / an interesting problem. / I know Dad’s joking, / but sometimes / Emma is my dilemma.” At times, Jessica is frustrated and aggravated by her sister. However, it is clear how much she cares for her when Emma hurts her arm after falling while trying to reach Jessica in her tree house. Emma has to wear a cast and Jessica is the first person to sign it. The illustrations capture the warm and loving relationship between the two siblings. (JM)



***Lemonade: And Other Poems Squeezed from a Single Word***

Written by Bob Raczka;  
Illustrated by Nancy Doniger

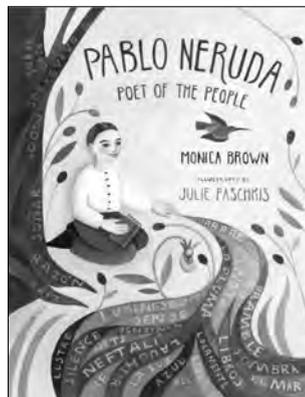
Roaring Brook Press,  
2011, 44 pp., ISBN 978-1-59643-541-4

The poems in this clever collection are “part anagram, part rebus, [and] part

riddle” (unpaged). At the beginning, the author writes, “I love playing with words. That’s why I write poems. I also love to see how other people play with words. That’s why I read poems. One day I was reading about poems on the Internet, and I came across the poetry of Andrew Russ. Andrew makes poems out of single words. Here’s my favorite:

rain  
i  
ra n  
in

As you can see, Andrew used “rain” as his title, and then he wrote three more words using only the letters from the word “rain” . . . After I discovered one-word poems, I just had to try writing some for myself” (unpaged). This book features 22 one-word poems about topics that will certainly appeal to children including chocolate, bicycles, playgrounds, spaghetti, pepperoni, earthworms, and ladybugs. My favorite poem is entitled “friends,” and it reads, “Fred finds Ed” (p. 15). In three words, it describes the meaning of friendship and conveys the power of poetry to capture the essence of people, places, and things. Children will enjoy this collection and may be tempted to create their own poems. (JM)



***Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People***

Written by Monica Brown; Illustrated by Julie Paschkis  
Henry Holt, 2011,  
unpaged, ISBN 978-0-8050-9198-4

This picturebook biography begins with, “From the moment he could talk, Neftalí

surrounded himself with words that whirled and swirled, just like the river that ran near his home in Chile.” In the accompanying illustration, there is a flowing river in different shades of blues with Spanish and English words interwoven such as *sueño*, *suerte*, *suspiro* and *pop*, *plop*, *plummet*, *plunge*. Neftalí wasn’t very good at soccer or at throwing acorns like his friends, but he loved to read and discover magic between the pages of books. He also loved to run off into the forest to search for beetles, birds’ eggs, and ferns. Julie Paschkis’s vibrant illustrations depict words in every blade of grass, leaf, or tree limb.

A special teacher inspired Neftalí to become a writer, and he began writing poems about the things he loved, including nature, opposites, joy and sadness, and children. As a teenager, he changed his name to Pablo Neruda so that he could publish his poetry. Later, he fought for justice and wrote poems to honor workers who struggled for freedom. This book demonstrates how illustrations and words support one another to create meaning. The images, with the individual words imbedded, communicate and convey more messages. Pablo Neruda became a poet of the people, giving hope and dreams of peace. After reading, children will want to seek out Pablo Neruda’s poems. (DD)



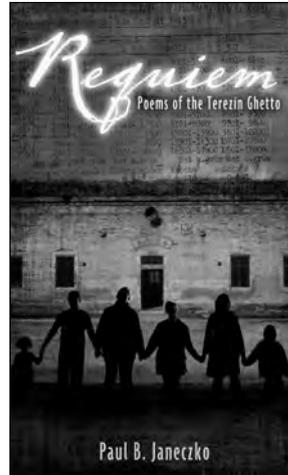
***Roots and Blues:  
A Celebration***

Written by Arnold Adoff;  
Illustrated by R. Gregory  
Christie  
Clarion Books, 2011, 86  
pp., ISBN 978-0-547-  
23554-7

The subtitle of “a  
celebration” captures  
the purpose and  
overall feeling of this  
collection of poems

dedicated to the tradition of the blues. However, the book goes beyond just celebrating or reflecting on the blues by bringing historical and political context into the story. As he has done in the past, Adoff has not created concrete poems, but he uses deliberate word placement and spacing to add emphasis and signal the reader to notice patterns and pauses. Even the end pages extend the informational aspect of this piece with hand-lettered names of famous blues musicians etched in chalk-like light blue.

Christie’s illustrations accompany the collection but are not correlated to individual poems; instead, they are interspersed on one- and two-page spreads throughout the book. The illustrations extend the themes from the poems and add a human face to the stories. Christie uses acrylic paint and his characteristic expressionistic style to convey both the severity of slavery and the passion behind this music. The use of blues and grays for faces appropriately and effectively reinforce Adoff’s tone. *Roots and Blues* is made up of 60 pieces—poems and prose that offer readers a better understanding of the blues and, as far as is possible without hearing the music, the sense of a “blues experience.” (LC)



***Requiem: Poems of  
the Terezin Ghetto***

Written by Paul B.  
Janeczko  
Candlewick Press, 2011,  
102 pp., ISBN 978-0-  
7636-4727-8

In 1941, the Nazis  
transformed  
Terezin, an isolated  
fortress town in  
Czechoslovakia, into a  
concentration camp for  
Jews. When Terezin  
was finally liberated

by the Russians in 1945, rescuing approximately 18,000 in the camp at the time, a total of nearly 140,000 Jews had passed through the collection and transportation camp. Although 35,000 never left Terezin, more than 87,000 were sent to other camps where execution was most likely their fate. Through a series of poems (aimed at young adults), heart-wrenching stories of fear, false hope, abandonment, love, hangings, rage, endurance, and stonings are told by a wide range of affected people—Jewish inmates; SS Captains, Kommandants, and Sergeants; sympathizing Czech residents who were forced to move as the Jews arrived; and Miklos, a young boy called “Professor” because he frequently writes in his journal. Paired with black-and-white sketches that vividly portray the isolation, torment, despair, and rage felt by the inmates, these 35 solemn poems authentically reflect the harsh realities of life in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Back matter includes historical events and facts, recommended resources, and a list of foreign words and phrases. (AB)

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