This open-themed children’s literature review column features a selection of some of our favorite recently published titles. There are books across multiple genres, including biography, informational text, poetry, and fiction. Readers will find titles about numerous topics such as Bigfoot, Benjamin Franklin, twins, rainforest animals, and bones. We hope that teachers, teacher educators, librarians, and others who read this column will encounter multiple titles that they can delight in sharing with their students.

Who’s In the Tree? And Other Lift-the-Flap Surprises
Written and illustrated by Craig Shuttlewood

This interactive picture-book begins with, “WHO’S iN the tRee BUt SHOULDN’T Be? Let’s liFt tHe FLaP, and we will see!” A gray owl sitting in a large tree says, “Welcome to our tree, bee.” The worm poking out of an apple remarks, “Should we offer iced tea?” Then the flap reveals a penguin that says, “It’s too HOT here for me!” The book continues in this same manner, introducing new animals to environments they do not belong in. Children will visit the rain forest, city, desert, ocean, arctic, space, and finally the zoo where all of the animals congregate. Another page asks, “WHO IN DEEP SPACE IS OUT OF PLACE, WITH LONG, THIN NECK AND STARTLED FACE?” A martian in a space ship exclaims, “Do you want to race?” Another says, “Back to base?” And the animals that were on the previous pages say, “We should follow just in case.” When the flap is lifted, the giraffe admits, “I’m no flying ace.” The final page shows every animal and asks, “WHO’S In This Zoo And Just Won’t Do?” By lifting the flap, children will realize that they are the odd ones out. The colorful illustrations are appealing, with doodles, scribbles, and amusing details such as big eyes and a small recurring space ship. This is an engaging book that will entertain preschoolers to first graders. (DD)

The Monkey and the Bee
Written by C. P. Bloom
Illustrated by Peter Raymundo

For those who enjoyed reading C. P. Bloom’s The Monkey Goes Bananas, this book will surely be a welcome treat. The minimal text and supportive illustrations will engage emerging readers. In this follow-up title, the monkey wants to eat his banana and not share it with a persistent bee who is intent on getting a piece. The monkey’s determination to not share his banana lands him in big trouble with a lion, but in the end, the bee comes to his rescue. Part of the text reads, “The Monkey The Banana The Bee” and then later “The Lion?” Many of the action-
packed illustrations offer close-ups of the monkey and convey his emotions, which range from satisfaction to fear to anger. (JCM)

Jessica’s Box
Written and illustrated by Peter Carnavas

“Jessica’s mind was too busy for sleep. Her thoughts were already with tomorrow.” In anticipation of the number of friends she hopes to make on her first day of school, Jessica takes a box to school. Initially no one takes notice. When a crowd does gather, Jessica reaches into the box to showcase her teddy bear. In response, her classmates laugh or just walk away. On the second day, her box is filled with cupcakes that disappear without a “thank you” as quickly as she reveals them. On the third day, Jessica’s dog Doris makes her debut in the box and garners much attention from the children, until the school groundskeeper takes Doris home. It is what her classmate finds in Jessica’s box on the following day that helps Jessica fulfill her dreams of new friendships.

Jessica’s Box is an award-winning picturebook for Peter Carnavas. In this 2015 edition, re-commissioned by the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, Jessica’s narrative remains unchanged, and she is respectfully depicted in a wheelchair. Jessica’s physical challenges, however, are secondary to the emotion Carnavas conveys through minimal text, watercolor, and black pencil outline. The quiet scenes between Jessica and each of her parents are particularly compelling and invite exploration of problem solving and empathy, much like Bob Graham’s picturebooks. Readers will embrace Carnavas’s messages of humor, family, relationships, and self-worth reflected in his thoughtfully designed and illustrated vignettes, and they will cheer for Jessica when she realizes she had something very special to share after all. (AZ)

Sea Bones
Written and illustrated by Bob Barner

“Wonderful creatures live in the sea. / And some have bones like you and me.” And so begins this book about the bones of sea animals such as sharks, seals, and whales. The first page depicts a fish with the various parts of its skeleton (e.g., dorsal fin, caudal fin, vertebra, rib, etc.) labeled. An accompanying informational paragraph on each page elaborates on the rhymed text. For example, on the page that features the skeleton of the fish, the text reads, “Skeletons support the organs and muscles of many creatures in the sea. Most fish have a skeleton made of bone. Because it is inside their body, it is called an endoskeleton. Some animals, like lobsters, have a hard shell on the outside of their body, called an exoskeleton.” Barner explains that some animals in the sea, like jellyfish and anemones, do not have bones, but in this story he mainly focuses his attention on those that do. Various hues of blue, representing the water, are in the background of the pictures. The collage illustrations feature a wide variety of ocean animals in bright colors and are sure to give young readers much to pore over and talk about. Readers who enjoy this title might also want to read Barner’s Dem Bones (1996) and Dinosaur Bones (2001). (JCM)

Double Trouble for Anna Hibiscus!
Written by Atinuke
Illustrated by Lauren Tobia

Adding to a series of seven early chapter books and two picturebooks about Anna Hibiscus’s wonderful life in “amazing Africa,” Nigerian storyteller Atinuke and English illustrator Lauren Tobia have teamed up for a tenth
success. In this picturebook, Anna, initially excited about new twin brothers, develops doubts after her cousins warn that “Two boys!” means “Big Trouble!”

As Anna seeks reassurance, her concern deepens. Desiring her morning mother-daughter cuddle, she is halted by Papa because Anna’s mother needs rest. The twins have worn her out. Then, there is no ogi (a Nigerian fermented cereal) ready for Anna. Uncle Bizi is busy making food for her mother. Her usual breakfast companion—her Grandmother—is sleeping after a long night as midwife. Even her aunties are busy rocking the twins.

Tobia’s expressive illustrations show Anna moving through perplexity, sadness, worry, irritation, and finally outright anger as she fears she is no longer valued. Her emotions of jealousy, loneliness, frustration, and tenderness are equally clearly conveyed, as are the concerned and caring looks of adult family members. With a warm embrace and patience, Papa calms Anna and demonstrates through words and actions that love is neither finite nor static in her close-knit family. The expansive joy of the book’s message is mirrored in brightly colored images that fill pages and extend across gutters to reveal details about Anna’s family’s life in modern Africa. The endpapers frame this delightfully realistic and heartwarming story, from the night of the twins’ birth to the next day’s gratifying resolution. (KJM)

**A Nest Is Noisy**
Written by Dianna Hutts Aston
Illustrated by Sylvia Long

Award-winning collaborators Dianna Hutts Aston and illustrator Sylvia Long, creators of *A Seed Is Sleepy* (2007) and *A Rock Is Lively* (2012), once again achieve a beautiful and illuminating celebration of nature in their newest publication, *A Nest Is Noisy*. Readers will learn the smallest of details about these dwellings and will without a doubt appreciate the sophistication and variety of their occupants, artfully brought together across the pages of this picturebook. A fascinating array of nests cover the front endpapers, and their bird, amphibian, mammal, insect, or fish inhabitants are represented on the back endpapers, framing the diversity of life and shelters in the pages between the two. Each delicate illustration is clearly labeled without distracting from the larger visual display.

As expected, Aston’s writing is lovely, well researched, and informative, and Long’s illustrations are expressive, precise, and eye-catching. Each double-page spread features a hand-scripted characteristic of nests and focuses on this feature, such as “A nest is welcoming.” These written frames are complemented by more instructive paragraphs and illustrations, some even featuring nests at scale, as noted by the small rulers rendered in the illustrations itself. Throughout, readers will find dense but manageable bursts of information about “the buzzing . . . squeaking . . . peep-peeping . . . bubbling babies” that reside in these nests, the structures and materials shaping them, and the very different places one might encounter these intricately constructed refuges that are no longer noisy once the youngest residents “are ready to fly, swim, or crawl away.” (AZ)

**Mesmerized: How Ben Franklin Solved a Mystery That Baffled All of France**
Written by Mara Rockliff
Illustrated by Jacopo Bruno

This story begins with a mature Ben Franklin travelling to France to seek support for American Revolutionaries. The illustration seems to fit this solemn purpose, until one’s eye is drawn to the exaggerated depiction of the already extravagant Marie Antoinette (and to the apparent
Kraken in the Atlantic). Throughout, the book blends historical information and images with entertaining expressions and word play. Franklin found Parisians focused on this remarkable, thrilling, and strange thing called science, and on the scientific method Franklin used to gather evidence to support his hypothesis that “lightning was the same as electricity” (p. 8). Enter Dr. Mesmer—in a richly framed, double-page spread with his name in enormous white gilded letters—and his pseudoscience of mesmerizing healing through “animal magnetism” (p. 44). Franklin was “PLAIN and SIMPLE” (p. 12), described in a traditional serif font. Mesmer was “ELEGANT and MYSTERIOUS” (p. 12), his name written in decorative font surrounded by swirling, vine-like doodles. Mesmer’s vacuous style and fraudulent flair, however, cannot thwart Franklin’s scientific method!

Through images that reflect (and sometimes satirize) the period—upper-class customs of dress, hair style, and actions—Iacopo Bruno infuses visual interest and humor into Mara Rockliff’s exciting history. The playfulness of text design and layout and the shifting juxtaposition of image and word heighten the book’s appeal. Endpapers sporting psychedelic circles and a bold “M” mesmerize before the story starts and offer a final wink-and-a-nod to the hoax. An explanation of the placebo effect and its importance to science precedes a four-page discussion of historical events, including references. This fabulously fun book is a must-read (aloud) across all elementary grades. (KJM)

Rainforest Colors
Written by Janet Lawler
Photographs by Tim Laman

Bright green endpapers with a flying rhinoceros hornbill shown against a goldenrod background pull readers into the brilliant colors of unique animals inhabiting our planet’s rainforests. In focus on the first double-page spread, these brightly billed birds perch high in a tree and frame the vastness of a rainforest that extends as a blurred backdrop to the title page. Turning the page, readers enter the forest and are greeted by the direct gaze of a red leaf monkey carrying her baby, their luxurious orange hairs individually visible in the high-resolution image. This visual feast is continued in photographs of a luminous blue Ulysses butterfly, the sharp yellow of an orb weave spider’s head, a flamboyantly scarlet ibis, two soft brown tree kangaroos, a bubbly pink fiddler crab, and the vibrant violet feathers of a purple honeycreeper—among other remarkable animals.

Overlaying each full-bleed, double-page image is brief but informative text and a question designed to stimulate discussion or reflection during a read-aloud. An enticing “Did you know?” box offers an additional noteworthy fact about the animal. On pages 26–27, each animal is depicted in a colorful collector-card format, including particulars about its home, size, food, predators, and babies. The next two pages highlight each animal’s location in rainforests across the globe. Direct questions invite readers to return to specific pages and identify additional colors, such as the honeycreeper’s florescent yellow feet. The photographer’s note, a glossary, and recommended sources for more information close this captivating book for emerging and young readers. (KJM)

Bigfoot Is Missing!
Written by J. Patrick Lewis
and Kenn Nesbitt
Illustrated by MinaLima

“CRYPTOZOOLOGY is the study of hidden animals, or those whose real existence has not yet been proven.” In Bigfoot Is Missing, past and present Children’s Poet Laureates J. Patrick Lewis and Kenn Nesbitt craft an unexpected, edgy,
and humorous collection of poems that explore the creatures of lore that lurk in darkness and shadow, sometimes called cryptids. Chupacabra, Kraken, Bigfoot, and the Mongolian Death Worm are among the eighteen beasts that readers may or may not (be careful!) find within this book. Readers will have to look twice as both the poems and the creatures are situated in the most surprising of places. Rather than present a poem and an illustration of each creature, each opening is arranged to appear as though the reader has encountered a different scene: a milk carton ad, a billboard, a Wanted poster, or breaking news on the television. A blurred image of Bigfoot, for example, appears on the side of a milk carton and underneath the image are the tongue-and-cheek lines of poetry explaining that he is missing.

Appropriately, readers never have a complete look at the creatures—just silhouettes, sharp claws, and yellow eyes hint at their presence. MinaLima, the British design team of Miraphona Mina and Eduardo Lima, complete the collection with bold and modern illustrations of the cryptids’ whereabouts. The endpapers offer informative details and tales about these and other creatures, including where they can—and can’t—be found. Readers young and old will take to these poems, especially those who prefer the bizarre and unusual. (AZ)

Extraordinary People: A Semi-Comprehensive Guide to Some of the World’s Most Fascinating Individuals
Written by Michael Hearst
Illustrated by Aaron Schamihorn

“What makes someone extraordinary?” (p. 7) is a question that Michael Hearst poses to readers near the opening of this eclectic biography featuring 50 intriguing individuals. Hearst provides his answer to the question by noting that “any number of traits or qualities, or even circumstances” (p. 7) can make an individual extraordinary. Some of the extraordinary people included in this engaging collective biography include well-known figures such as Evel Knievel, George Washington Carver, Bessie Coleman, Mark Twain, Jacques Cousteau, Bruce Lee, and Deion Sanders. There are many captivating biographies of lesser-known people, such as Stagecoach Mary (the second African American woman to work as a mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service), Bobby Fischer (a brilliant and enigmatic chess player), Alicia Alonso (a ballerina dancer who continued performing even after losing her sight), Ruth Wakefield (a Massachusetts innkeeper who invented chocolate chip cookies), and Roy Sullivan (a park ranger who was struck by lightning 7 times).

There are biographies of people across various racial groups from all around the world and across various time periods. For instance, there is a biography of Ötzi the Iceman, born around 330 B.C.E, and one of Malala Yousafzai, born in 1997, who in 2013 “became the youngest person in history to be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize” (p. 108). Each biography features a full-page illustration of the person on the right page, while the left page features a brief biography with interesting facts (sometimes in the form of questions). For example, readers learn that Bruce Lee “did push-ups using just two fingers” (p. 70), that Deion Sanders “is the only person to have hit a Major League Baseball home run and scored a National Football League touchdown in the same week!” (p. 92), and that for her chocolate chip cookies recipe, Nestlé paid Ruth Wakefield with a “lifetime supply of chocolate” (p. 104). Hearst liven this biography with a quirky sense of humor, and he provides a balanced view of many of these individuals by pointing out their strengths as well as their shortcomings—something all of us can relate to. This book deserves a spot in all elementary and middle school libraries! (JCM)
Echo
Written by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Echo is a powerful story about three children who have challenging lives in which a magical harmonica helps each of them. The book begins with a fairy tale in which Otto is lost in a forbidden forest and meets three sisters. Then the book shares three separate stories in three sections. First, readers meet Friedrich in Nazi Germany who has a birthmark on his face and has been given the nickname Monster Boy. Friedrich dreams of becoming a conductor and moves his hands to music that only he can hear. His classmates make fun of him, but the magical harmonica gives him strength. Next, readers meet Mike in Pennsylvania who is in an orphanage waiting for a family to adopt him. Mike plays the piano and learns the harmonica easily. He wins a spot in a harmonica orchestra in hopes of helping his little brother. Later, Ivy in California receives the same harmonica that both Friedrich and Mike used. Her family manages a farm for a Japanese family that is being held in an internment camp. Ivy must attend an annex instead of the main school because of her Mexican descent. Each story is engaging, and in the final chapter, all of the characters come together around the theme of music. With many themes such as war, race, music, bullying, poverty, injustice, and family, this book would be perfect for literature circles. (DD)

Mark of the Thief
Written by Jennifer A. Nielsen
Scholastic, 2015, 339 pp., ISBN 978-0-545-56154-9

Jennifer A. Nielsen’s newest series, set during the Roman Empire, is full of mythology and history. Nicolas Calva and his sister are slaves working in a mine south of Rome where their master whips them and keeps them in chains. Nic is ordered to explore a dark cave that is believed to contain Julius Caesar’s lost treasure. Once inside, he finds a griffin named Caela guarding piles of gold coins, rings, and goblets. In order to fight off the king of the birds and the beasts, he puts on a gold bulla, a good luck pendant, and immediately receives magical powers. With the cave’s entrance blocked, Nic and Caela take flight before the cavern collapses. Later, both are captured and forced to fight in an animal show in an amphitheater. With the help of the bulla, they survive the games, but Nic finds himself in the middle of a conspiracy to overthrow the emperor. He isn’t sure who he can trust because every Roman senator and official wants the gold bulla and the magical powers. Nic ends up hiding in the sewers where a clever friend, Aurelia, helps him try to stop the revolution, find his sister, and gain his freedom. Readers will enjoy Nic’s sarcastic and witty personality along with the fast-paced action, fantasy, and intrigue. (DD)

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