

Talking about Books:

Outstanding Nonfiction Choices for 1997

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The Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children was established in 1989 to promote and recognize excellence in nonfiction writing for children. The award's name commemorates Johannes Amos Comenius' work, Orbis Pictus—The World in Pictures (1657), considered to be the first book actually planned for children. Each year, one award book and up to five honor books are named. In addition, the award committee selects other titles it considers outstanding. The criteria used in the selection of books include accuracy, content, style, organization, illustration, and format. This column features the outstanding nonfiction titles published in 1997 and selected by the 1998 Orbis Pictus Award Committee: Myra Zarnowski (Chair and Guest Editor), Elaine Aoki, Julie Jensen, Richard Kerper, Ruth Nathan, and Karen Patricia Smith.

AWARD AND HONOR BOOKS

1998 Orbis Pictus Award

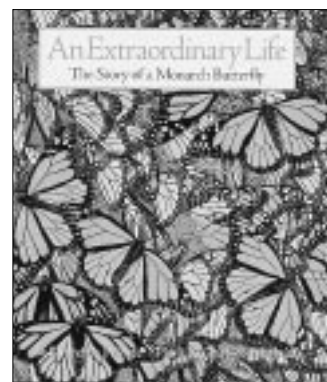
An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly.

Pringle, Laurence. Illustrated with paintings by Bob Marstall. Orchard Books, 1997. (ISBN: 0-531-30002-1, trade) (ISBN: 0-531-33002-8, library). 64 pp. \$18.95. Ages 9 and up.

This beautifully designed life-cycle book uses the most current research on *Danaus plexippus*, the northern milkweed-consuming monarch butterfly, to explore its development, its migration, and the perils to its survival. Using a narrative style, Laurence Pringle focuses on one monarch butterfly, that he names Danaus, and takes the reader on her journey from a western Massachusetts hayfield through the overwinter fir forests in the volcanic ranges west of Mexico City, to the milkweed-studded pastures of Arkansas. Colorful illustrations by landscape painter, Bob Marstall, provide illuminating perspectives of the monarch's development and anatomy as well as its food sources and natural predators.

In delimiting the intelligence of the monarch butterfly, Pringle is at his best. He walks close to the line but avoids anthropomorphism by depending on feedback from an expert on monarchs. What seems to the layperson at first like intentional thought proves to be only an example of the instincts of the butterfly. Pringle combines the craft of the fiction writer with the nonfiction writer's attention to accuracy.

A map of the United States and Mexico showing Danaus' route and a landscape of a Massachusetts hayfield open the book and help to locate the reader. Numerous sidebars containing illustrations, maps, labels, and captions expand the text. Two final chapters provide information on efforts to conserve the monarch's winter refuges



and on the raising and releasing of monarch butterflies. A bibliography for additional reading and a detailed index make this book a useful reference tool. Fans of Pringle and Marstall's collaboration can also experience this team's creativity in *Fire in the Forest: A Cycle of Growth and Renewal* (Atheneum, 1995).

1998 Orbis Pictus Honor Book

A Drop of Water: A Book of Science and Wonder.

Wick, Walter. Illustrated with photographs. Scholastic, 1997. (ISBN: 0-590-22197-3). 40 pp. \$16.95. Ages 8 and up.

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Walter Wick presents readers with a science book filled with wonderment and awe. We begin the book as if we are in a science lab, perhaps attending a lecture:

We are going to spend an hour today in following a drop of water on its travels. If I dip my finger in this basin of water and lift it up again, I bring with it a small glistening drop out of the water below and hold it before you. Tell me, have you any idea where this drop has been? What changes it has undergone, and what work it has been doing during all the long ages water has lain on the face of the earth? (Arabella B. Buckley, 1878, p. 5)

Each pristine page presents a brilliant artistic photo of water in its various states. With the clarity of magnified stop-action photography, Wick captures his readers and takes them into the scientific examination of water. As readers move through the book, they observe water in the form of tiny droplets, waves, ice, rainbows, steam, frost, and dew. Included with each photo masterpiece is a short scientific essay about each water form and its transformation through evaporation, condensation, and surface-tension force.

This book is a brilliant presentation of science and art which will cause readers to take multiple trips back into the book as they glean information from both print and photography. Cleverly written experiments are included in the end pages of the book. To further entice readers, Wick encourages them to undertake their own examination of the properties of water.

1998 Orbis Pictus Honor Book

A Tree Is Growing.

Dorros, Arthur. Illustrated by S. D. Schindler. Scholastic, 1997. (ISBN: 0-590-45300-9). 32 pp. \$15.95. Ages 7 and up. Have you ever wondered why the baobab tree is round and swollen in rainy weather and thin in dry weather? Can you guess why a mark made on a tree will still be in the same place on that tree, twenty years later? Or, perhaps you have wondered what the seeds of a palm tree are called. In *A Tree Is Growing*, Arthur Dorros shares with us the answers to these questions and other intriguing facts about trees, their life processes, and the nature of their anatomy.

Dorros' text is poetic and fulfilling. The reader comes away amazed at the amount of information offered within these 32 pages. We learn that the baobab tree stores water in its trunk, hence its round, swollen appearance during the rainy season. We discover that, since a tree always grows from the top, a mark made on its trunk will be in the same place twenty years later. And it is revealed that the seeds of a palm tree are, in fact, called coconuts. This is accomplished through a fascinating text, carefully and colorfully illustrated by S. D. Schindler. Schindler, a botanist, offers his audience delicately rendered illustrations in various shades of green and brown through the medium of colored pencil on parchment and pastel papers. A text well balanced with informative illustrations makes this book a thoroughly absorbing read.

1998 Orbis Pictus Honor Book

Charles A. Lindbergh: A Human Hero.

Giblin, James Cross. Clarion Books, 1997.

(ISBN: 0-395-63389-3). 212 pp. \$20.00. Ages 10 and up.

In aviation history Charles Lindbergh soars with the great ones. Achieving historic firsts and setting speed records, Lindbergh became a superhero during the first third of the twentieth century. The kidnapping of his baby boy deeply affected him and the nation. The conviction of Bruno Hauptmann contributed to their healing. In James Cross Giblin's skillful hands, these familiar events take on a new life, retaining the dramatic nature of each unfolding moment.

Giblin begins by taking the reader inside Charles' Swedish American family. When Charles was four years old, his father was elected to Congress. Charles and his mother divided their time between Minnesota and Washington, D.C. It was during this period that Charles grew tired of the puffed-up language of politics and showed a preference for the precision of scientific thought applied by his maternal grandfather, a dentist and inventor, and his mother, a high school science teacher. During this period, Charles' curiosity became firmly rooted and began to determine the direction his life would take.

In this complete biography, Giblin humanizes Lindbergh by presenting his flaws as well as his accomplishments. Giblin reveals Lindbergh's Nazi sympathies in an even-handed manner. Here, and throughout the book, he is careful to allow the man's own words and those of people near him to disclose his character.

An extensive index, source notes, and a chronology make Giblin's book a useful reference tool. This volume could be used in conjunction with Barry Denenberg's biography, *An American Hero: The True Story of Charles A. Lindbergh* (Scholastic, 1996). Exploring the differences in the authors' perspectives could foster students' critical reading. The 1992 Orbis Pictus winner, *Flight: The Journey of Charles Lindbergh*, by Robert Burleigh, illustrated by Mike Wimmer, a picture book that covers Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, could be used profitably as well.

1998 Orbis Pictus Honor Book

Digger: The Tragic Fate of the California Indians from the Missions to the Gold Rush.

Stanley, Jerry. Crown, 1997. (ISBN: 0-517-70951-1, trade). (ISBN: 0-517-70952-X, library). 103 pp. \$18.00. Ages 12 and up.

With an opening tableau reminiscent of Native people encountering Christopher Columbus, Jerry Stanley helps his soon-to-be-mesmerized reader envision California Indians viewing Father Junipero Serra for the first time. The year is 1769. Serra is a Franciscan priest from Mexico who has come to California to convert California Indians to the Catholic religion and the Spanish way of life: “The Indians had never seen a mule before, and it seemed to them that Serra was part human and part animal” (p. 1). Stanley states, “This is a story of the California Indians and their struggle to survive” (p. 2), the story that many textbooks and nonfiction literature books either cover up or gloss over.

Digger is divided into three parts: Indian life before White contact, the Mission period of Spanish colonization, and the Gold Rush, when Americans from all walks of life overran the fledgling state. Unfortunately, the devil is in the details: Missions were essentially slave-labor camps; attempts by the new state government to massacre whole tribes is documented; and violence and racism ran rampant. Some facts will be hard for young audiences to understand and assimilate, as is the real and detailed truth of African American slavery. As Stanley says, “rushed through the first state legislature in 1850, the Indian Indenture Act made it legal to own Indians and to work them as slaves” (p. 69).

Digger is an important book for all Americans to read. A recommended companion to *Digger* is *California's Indians and the Gold Rush* by Clifford E. Trafzer (Sierra Oaks Publishing, 1989) because of its depiction of Indians responding to profound social change. Books such as Trafzer's are needed in order to balance Stanley's account, just as books documenting Jewish resistance to Nazi occupation and extermination, as well as the African American resistance to slavery and starvation of the mind, are required. *Digger* includes maps, a chronology, prints, and a glossary of selected California Indian tribal names.

1998 Orbis Pictus Honor Book

Kennedy Assassinated! The World Mourns: A Reporter's Story.

Hampton, Wilborn. Candlewick, 1997. (ISBN: 1-56402-811-9). 96 pp. \$17.99. Ages 10 and up.

At 12:34 p.m. on November 22, 1963, Bill Hampton, a very inexperienced reporter working for United Press International picked up the phone and received the shocking news. Shots had been fired at President Kennedy's motorcade as it was traveling through downtown Dallas. The gripping story

of Kennedy's assassination and its shocking aftermath is well told by Hampton, an on-the-spot reporter who happened to be thrown in the path of this historic event.

From the initial phone call, Hampton takes us along with him as he rushes at breakneck speed to Parkland Hospital where he connects with other reporters, manages to tie up a phone connection between the hospital and U.P.I. (United Press International) so that he can relay information as he gets it—information about Kennedy's death, Lyndon Johnson's whereabouts, and inauguration plans.

From there, he's sent to police headquarters in Dallas to cover the story of suspect Lee Harvey Oswald. Here he sees Oswald being taken back and forth for questioning, and observes the growing frenzy of activity as reporters from all over the world arrive.

While Hampton continues to narrate the events that follow—Oswald's death at the hands of Jack Ruby and the Kennedy funeral—the focus is clearly on Hampton as a reporter. As he states at the end of the book, “being involved in the coverage of those events was like being in the eye of a tornado with the terrible winds of history swirling about me” (p. 88). This fascinating, page-turning read makes an excellent introduction to the Kennedy era and does much to demystify how news information was gathered.

OTHER OUTSTANDING
NONFICTION TITLES

Understanding the Past: History and Biography

Catching the Fire: Philip Simmons, Blacksmith.

Lyon, Mary E. Houghton Mifflin, 1997. (ISBN: 0-395-72033-8). 48 pp. \$16.00. Ages 8 and up.

From “horse buggy wheels to carts, carriages, wagons, trucks, and gates,” he learned to change with the times. No matter the task, he has brought pride and honor to every job. Perhaps he knows the secret to true wealth: never give up the work you love. (p. 45)

The story of a thirteen-year-old great-grandson of slaves who “caught a fire” that burned for 70 years is told in the newest biography in Mary Lyon's American Artisans series. We learn that Philip Simmons's path to national recognition as an artist in iron was strewn with hardships and indignities. His museum-quality art and the architectural adornments—gates, fences, and railings—that grace the homes of Charleston, South Carolina, demonstrate that joy, pride, and hard work triumphed over poverty, racism, and family tragedy.

Enlivened by Simmons's own words, the text is complemented by well captioned, black-and-white, period photographs and by Mannie Garcia's striking color photographs of artistic processes, materials, and, most of all, works of art. End matter includes an afterword, related books of interest, an index, and abundant source notes revealing the scholar-

ship underlying this fine example of nonfiction for children. The text is primarily built upon Lyon's face-to-face and telephone interviews with Simmons, and also upon newspaper articles, documentary films, and a biography by John Vlach which initially chronicled Simmon's work and helped to bring it recognition (*Charleston Blacksmith: The Work of Philip Simmons*, University of Georgia Press, 1981).

Told with admiration and respect, the story of the "Dean of Blacksmiths" inspires readers to catch a fire that may one day bring joy to their lives.

Fiery Vision: The Life and Death of John Brown.

Cox, Clinton. Scholastic, 1997. (ISBN: 0-590-47574-6).

230 pp. \$15.95. Ages 10 and up.

The year was 1800. In May of that year, a child was born whose humanitarian efforts and fiery ideals would make an indelible mark on the shameful institution of slavery. In clear and affecting prose, Clinton Cox tells the story of abolitionist John Brown. Brown is portrayed as a man of great conviction and little patience. From an early age, his father shared with him his passionate belief in the principles of equality. His mother's death when he was eight began an erosion of childhood security. It was a pivotal experience which would help frame his passionate ideals regarding the buying and selling of slaves and the forced dissolution of Black families.

Cox provides his readers with a narrative which unfolds in a logical and sensitive manner. Brown is portrayed as a deep thinker, a man whose mind would catch hold of an ethical issue, turning it over and over again until the details fell into place. His struggle to free Black captives from slavery would take him to many parts of the country: from Springfield, Massachusetts, to North Carolina; from New York to London, England, and beyond. The well written, and often dramatic text is enriched by period illustrations and photographs of historic houses and sites. Readers will gain an understanding of Brown's relationship to other important figures of the day, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman.

A moving tribute to a man of fiery ideals, *Fiery Vision: The Life and Death of John Brown* offers an illuminating view of this important historic figure.

The Dead Sea Scrolls.

Cooper, Ilene. Illustrated by John Thompson. Morrow Jr.

Books, 1997. (ISBN: 0-688-14300-8). 58 pp. \$15.00.

Ages 10 and up.

Cooper opens her book on the archaeological discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, published during the 50th anniversary of their recovery by stating:

If talk radio had been around two thousand or so years ago in the land we now call Israel, people would have been discussing how their country was in a state of unrest, what was to become of the Jewish religion, and whether or not the end of the world was near, as some prophets claimed. Up

until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, listening in on that long-ago era could only be done secondhand. (p. 1)

Blending ancient history with the events of 1947, Cooper develops a detailed picture of the Scrolls' discovery as well as their significance and contribution to our understanding of ancient changes in Judaism and the rise of Christianity. She escorts the reader through a Bedouin shepherd's unintentional discovery of scrolls in a cave, scholars' and scientists' attempts to buy the scrolls, and reconstructive and interpretive work using the latest technology.

Cooper is careful to note interpretations that are generally accepted as fact and presents multiple perspectives when consensus has not been reached by scholars. In fact, her author's note points out the tenuous nature of so-called historical fact, briefly providing readers with insight into the nonfiction writer's process. The book offers a timeline and a glossary to assist young readers in organizing and understanding the content. An annotated bibliography of related print and internet resources is provided. The inclusion of an index makes it possible to use this narrative text for research purposes. To provide historical background, Cooper's book could be used with 1997 Orbis Pictus Honor Book, *One World, Many Religions: The Ways We Worship*, by Mary Pope Osborne (Knopf, 1996).

Leon's Story.

Tillage, Leon Walter. Illustrated with collage art

by Susan L. Roth. Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997.

(ISBN: 0-374-34379-9). 107 pp. \$14.00. Ages 10 and up.

When speaking of *Leon's Story*—one African American man's life before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement—the poet Nikki Giovanni recounts that we are "taken into a private world of hopes and dreams that dash against the very public world of segregation and denial" (back cover). Indeed we are. Leon writes, "I mean, you could buy a soda anywhere; out on the streets they had pushcarts, but it wasn't like the soda you could get from where you weren't supposed to get it" (p. 49).

Leon is Leon Walter Tillage, born in 1936 and raised on the outskirts of Fuquay, a Jim Crow town just outside Raleigh, North Carolina. The voice heard in this memoir is one of the most authentic human voices found in children's literature today, much like the honest voice of Liddy, the main character in *Drylongso*, by Virginia Hamilton (Harcourt, 1992). The son of a sharecropper, Leon recounts the humiliating trials of being black in Klan country:

Those nights my father would climb the ladder and go on top of the house and sit beside the chimney, and I'd climb the ladder, too, and take him coffee. . . . When the Klansmen came, my father would pound on the roof three times. Nobody was in bed but the young-uns. We sat up with the light out to wait and see if the Klansmen came. If they came

we used to take off—my father and mother and grandfather and us kids—everybody had a hiding place that we knew where to go . . . (pp. 58–59)

Despite the unthinkable trials Leon experiences (one leading to the death of his father), we also read about the frequent celebrations in a life bound by servitude. When asked by Susan Roth, the book's illustrator, about why he was not bitter, Leon replied, "What good would that do? I know there were bad times. . . . But you know, there were rejoicing times, too" (p. 106). Roth, not wanting to add any pictures to Leon's story, accompanies this text with black-and-white collages of designs and patterns.

Other current books that chronicle African American voices before the Civil Rights movement are *Slavery Time When I was Chillun*, by Belinda Hurmence (Putnam, 1997), and *I Was Born a Slave: The Story of Harriet Jacobs* by Jennifer Fleischner (Millbrook, 1997).

Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story.

Mochizuki, Ken. Illustrated by Dom Lee. Afterword by Hiroki Sugihara. Lee & Low, 1997. (ISBN: 1-880000-49-0). 32 pp. \$15.95. Ages 8 and up.

Passage to Freedom is the story of Chiune Sugihara and his courageous acts which freed thousands of Jewish refugees from sure death during the Holocaust. The historical account was related by the Japanese consul's son, Hiroki Sugihara, to Seattle author Ken Mochizuki. Together, Mochizuki and artist Dom Lee skillfully capture the voice and images of the story told by a young five-year-old Hiroki.

Their quiet story begins in 1940, where young Hiroki and his brother play with neighborhood Lithuanian children. One morning in late July, Hiroki and his younger brother were told by their parents not to let anyone see them through their living room windows. Jewish children along with their parents were huddled outside the Sugihara home desperate for help. The Jewish refugees needed to escape from the Nazi

soldiers who had taken over their country, and as Japanese consul, Chiune Sugihara could give them visas. Although the Japanese government repeatedly denied Sugihara's requests to issue these visas, he eventually decided to disobey his government. With the encouragement of his family, he wrote thousands of visas for Polish Jews. Because of this compassionate decision, it is estimated that Chiune Sugihara saved as many as 10,000 Jewish refugees.

In an afterword, Hiroki Sugihara shares with young readers how proud he is that his father had the courage to do what was right. He states that the years after the family left Lithuania were difficult ones. They were imprisoned in a Soviet internment camp and, when they finally returned to Japan, his father was asked to resign from the diplomatic service.

Years later, in 1969, Jewish refugees saved by Chiune Sugihara contacted him and invited him to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, where he was awarded the "Righteous Among Nations" Award. Six years after his death, a monument was dedicated in his birthplace of Yaotsu, Japan, on a hill that is now known as the "Hill of Humanity." Finally, in 1994, a group of Sugihara survivors traveled to Japan to re-dedicate the monument in a ceremony that was attended by several officials of the Japanese government in recognition of Sugihara's courageous act.

This is truly a compelling story of one person making a difference for all of humanity.

The Great Wall.

Mann, Elizabeth. Illustrated by Alan Witschonke. Mikaya Press, 1997. (ISBN: 0-9650493-39). 48 pp. \$18.95. Ages 9 and up.

In another time and another place, under an entirely different set of circumstances, another people sought to cope with the issue of personal security. There was disagreement in the Ming government about how to deal with the enemy. They could have chosen to attack, but the army was too weak and disorganized. It could not even guard the emperor. They could have chosen to establish peaceful trade with the Mongols, but the Chinese were too frightened and suspicious of their ancient enemy to do that. They turned instead to China's oldest form of defense—the wall. (p. 21)

With these words, readers are introduced to the creation of one of China's most marvelous man-made wonders, the Great Wall. In clear prose, which moves from the imaginative-story mode into factual narration, Elizabeth Mann tells of the conditions of war between the Chinese people and the nomadic Mongols. She relates her story in an accessible and riveting manner.

Stunning illustrations by Alan Witschonke support the text. Ancient Chinese paintings and modern artistic renditions brilliantly set the background for Mann's story. We are able to sense the frustration of the Ming Dynasty as it debates



the best way to defend its territory. In an illustration of the court, one man raises his hands in shock, while another places his hands on his forehead in despair. A third appears to be responding with a “how could this happen?” air. In front of us, and with her back to the reader, a mail-clad soldier delivers news of the kidnapping of Zhu Qizhen, emperor of the Ming dynasty. The scene is quiet, yet subtly demanding. It could almost be nicknamed “Dilemma.” The reader progresses in time as the illustrations gradually move from paintings and reproductions to more contemporary, almost photographic images.

Maps and an index are provided which aid readers in their understanding of the material. Informative sidebars supplement this richly illustrated story of the origins and development of a creative yet practical physical response to the threat of enemy invasion.

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Understanding The Natural World

Animal Dads.

Collard III, Sneed B. Houghton Mifflin, 1997. (ISBN: 0-395-83621-2). 32 pp. (Unpaged). \$15.95. Ages 4 and up.

“Dads do many things . . .” (p. 3). They build us homes, keep us snug and warm, bathe us, watch out for strangers, shelter us from harm, feed us, play, clean house, and perform many more parental duties. The roles and responsibilities of male animals in the wild—gorillas, emperor penguins, poison-arrow frogs, beavers, dwarf mongooses, killdeer, salmon, lions, wolves, gopher tortoises, megapodes, tamarin monkeys and others—are strikingly similar to the roles performed by many human dads. Strikingly dissimilar is the seahorse, which gives birth.

A central feature of the book’s brief but informative text is its appearance in two font sizes. A large bold font states the dad’s role, while a paragraph set in a smaller font elaborates the role as it applies to the specific species illustrated on that page: “A stickleback dad builds a nest out of pieces of plants . . .” (p. 5). Younger readers can enjoy the illustrations and the role statements alone, while older readers will be interested as well in the paragraph-length descriptions of the nurturing behaviors of fathers of particular species.

Not limited to the enjoyment of offspring alone, this book is one that dads should relish sharing with their preschool and primary-grade children. In the primary classroom, it could prompt talk, writing, and art about the responsibilities of children’s various family members, starting with fathers. As a commentary on everything male parents can be, *Animal Dads* defines fatherhood in such a creative way that future dads are never too young to ponder and that current dads can put to immediate use.

Steve Jenkins’ illustrations are bright and expressive collages fashioned from variant forms of paper—textured and smooth, multicolored and solid, cut and torn. Their contribution to the book’s appeal is immeasurable.

The Brain: Our Nervous System.

Simon, Seymour. Illustrated with photographs. Morrow, 1997. (ISBN: 0-688-14640-6, trade). (ISBN: 0-688-14641-4, library). 32 pp. \$16.00. Ages 8 and up.

When you have a clever thought, do you feel *brainy*? And when you forget something, do you feel *brainless*? It’s logical to both praise your brain for your strengths and blame it for your shortcomings since, according to Seymour Simon, “Your brain is really what makes you, *you*” (unpaged).



How does your brain receive messages and respond to them? To find out, readers follow the path of a single message through millions of nerve cells. Using a collection of eye-catching photographs taken with a scanning electron microscope, as well as models, diagrams, and cross-sections, Simon explains how the brain works in concert with other parts of the nervous system.

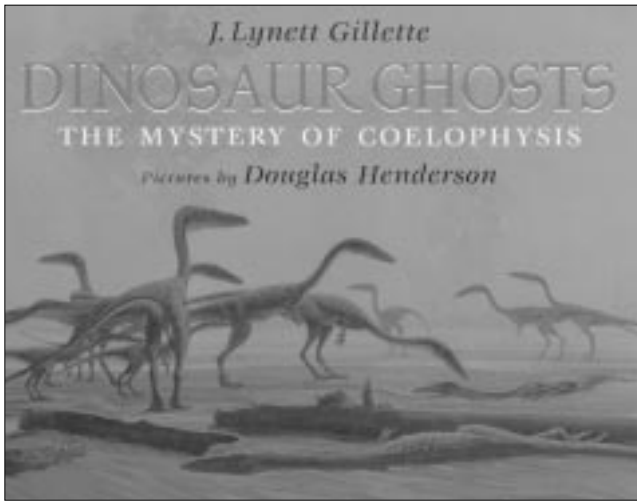
What are the various parts of the brain? How big are they? Where are they located? What do they do? These questions are addressed in the clear prose we have come to expect from Seymour Simon. For example, when describing the cerebral cortex, Simon gives readers a sense of its size, skillfully bridging the known and the unknown: “If it was flattened out, it would take up as much space as the top of a kitchen table” (unpaged).

While this book introduces a considerable number of vocabulary words necessary to discuss the brain—beginning with neurons, glial cells, and dendrites and moving on to the cerebrum, the cerebellum, the brain stem and more—the overall message is one of wonder at the power and complexity of the human body. Reminding us that there is still much we don’t know about how the brain functions, Simon concludes that we do know that the brain controls all of the systems of our body and is the center of how we think, feel, and remember. That’s not bad for something that weighs just three pounds and is about the size of a grapefruit!

Dinosaur Ghosts: The Mystery of Coelophysis.

Gillette, J. Lynett. Pictures by Douglas Henderson. Dial, 1997. (ISBN: 0-8037-1721-0, trade) (ISBN: 0-8037-1722-9, library). 32 pp. \$15.99. Ages 8 and up.

In 1947, Ned Colbert, a paleontologist for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, followed up on a tip from a field assistant and made a fabulous find. He found dozens and dozens of dinosaur skeletons buried in 225-million-year-old rock north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, at a place called Ghost Ranch. Some of these dinosaur skeletons were stretched out on their sides and their skeletons were



nearly complete. Others were separated in many places and had missing bones.

What happened to these dinosaurs? How did they die? How did they become buried in this way? A number of suggestions, or hypotheses, are suggested: Did they become stuck in the mud? Were they victims of a volcano? Did asteroids kick up huge clouds of dust? Was it poison? Floods? For each hypothesis except one, the author suggests a possible scenario and then suggests reasons why scientists believe the scenario is doubtful. For example, if the dinosaurs had been stuck in the mud they most probably would have been found upright with their legs buried more deeply in the mud than their heads, not lying on their sides as so many were. In the end, a final hypothesis is tentatively offered as the *best idea* so far, namely that too little water followed by too much water caused their deaths.

Author J. Lynett Gillette, curator of paleontology at the Ruth Hall Museum at Ghost Ranch, provides readers with a clear example of scientific reasoning. The text is accompanied by photos of the actual paleontologists at work as well as paintings envisioning Coelophysis dinosaurs in their natural environment. This is a compelling science mystery for budding dinosaur buffs.

A Log's Life.

Pfeffer, Wendy. Simon & Schuster, 1997.
(ISBN: 0-689-80636-1). 32 pp. (Unpaged). \$16.00.
Ages 4 and up.

On a stormy day, rain, wind, and lightning reduce an oak tree to a log. Various creatures move in, each taking its toll. Eventually the log falls apart, forming black dirt. Under that dirt an acorn sprouts, and a new oak tree grows. Although such is the substance of this introduction for young readers to the life cycle of a tree, it certainly is not the style. Pfeffer's lyrical and gentle text subtly directs readers' attention to forest details that might otherwise escape notice. Furthermore, from the book's ending springs a most satisfying new beginning:

Then one night
the wind whistles through the trees.
The old oak bends and shakes.
It crashes to the forest floor.
And becomes
another giant log. (p. 32)

A Log's Life is a visual treat because of Robin Brickman's use of a unique artistic medium to render its realistic illustrations: "I made the illustrations by cutting, painting, sculpting, and then gluing pieces of watercolor paper together. There are no found objects or real or preserved specimens in the artwork" (illustrator note, p. 3). The process proves so apt that the casual reader will most likely mistake glue and paper for the natural specimens they portray—leaves, bark, birds, small animals, insects.

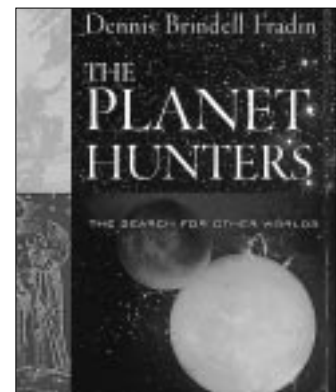
Teachers may combine *A Log's Life* with Alvin Tresselt's *The Gift of the Tree* (Lothrop, 1992), Naomi Russell's *The Tree* (Dutton, 1989), Eve Bunting's *Someday a Tree* (Clarion, 1993), and many other titles in studies not only of trees, but of forests as habitats, the food chain, and relationships in nature.

The Planet Hunters: The Search for Other Worlds.

Fradin, Dennis Brindell. Margaret K. McElderry Books/Simon & Schuster, 1997. (ISBN: 0-689-81323-6).
148 pp. \$19.95. Ages 10 and up.

There's something so pervasively kid-like about Dennis Fradin's writing that, despite its size and weight, *The Planet Hunters* feels light as a feather in the reader's hands. Should the book open accidentally to Figure 31, for example, the reader would find a dazzlingly deep view of the universe, as seen by the Hubble Space Telescope, and beneath it a typical Fradin tidbit—that this "deepest view" is some "19 billion light-years away, so we are seeing galaxies as they appeared soon after the universe began" (p. 109). "Awesome!" according to a group of fourth graders viewing the book for the first time.

Readers of this account of man's search for planets get off to a wonderfully curious and eerie start with a black-and-white print of wide-eyed aliens viewing their "outer space," looking as if they are about to ask the age-old *Earthling* question, "Is anyone else out there?" Then, briskly, Fradin takes his readers through time—from the early astronomers, Copernicus and Galileo, who discovered that the Earth orbits the sun; to the discovery of Uranus in 1781; to science in all of its glory—where Fradin artfully describes the battle over the discovery of Neptune.



This is a true example of “show” not “tell”: science as *process*. A firsthand conversation with Clyde Tombaugh, who discovered Pluto, adds great depth to this reading experience, as does the book’s index and the many charts, pictures and bibliographical references. With asteroids “out there” and astronomy suddenly on everyone’s mind, this is a perfect, turn-of-the-century gem for all students, young and old.

The Snake Book.

Ling, Mary, and Atkinson, Mary. Illustrated with photographs by Frank Greenaway and Dave King. DK Publishing, 1997. (ISBN: 0-7894-1526-7). 28 pp. (Unpaged). \$12.95. All ages.

This book screams “I dare you to touch me.” The detailed scales of slithering snakes will dare the curious reader. Photographers Greenaway and King have artfully given us a closer-than-life look at twelve unique species of snake. Each snake is framed in an identically sized specimen pan (except for the reticulated python captured in a two-page centerfold) in order for the investigating reader to compare the size and dimensions of each snake as they huddle against the sides of the pages or twist back and forth from edge to edge. Authors Ling and Atkinson capture in words the details of each snake, from their scaly patterns and textures to their fangs and venoms and their rattles and rasps. The layout is captivating with text varying in size and shape, slithering itself between the curves while daring, helping, and enticing the reader to “get into the snake pages.”

Slowly, the reluctant investigator is hypnotized by each snake and will soon appreciate its beauty and presence in the balance of life. Once inside, readers will gain an appreciative

understanding of the friendly snakes while making a visual mental imprint of those to stay clear of. The snake researchers among the readers will find a handy guide to snake statistics at the end of the book. For those who dare, this book will beckon you to reach out into the snake pit!

During this year’s selection process, the Orbis Pictus Award Committee was pleased to see several beautifully illustrated science books that introduce the reader to the wonder of the natural world. In addition, we noticed a number of biographies that show balanced, *textured* views of individuals—even incorporating seemingly contradictory aspects of their lives. These are trends we applaud.

At the same time, we noted an increasing tendency to include fictional elements within informational books, a tendency that parallels what many reviewers have noted in adult nonfiction. This is a trend we think bears careful scrutiny in terms of pushing the limits of the genre—which some critics see as evolving—and in terms of the impact of this fictionalized material on young readers.

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Send by January 31, 1999, 4 copies of letter-quality manuscripts (attach postage for mailing 3 copies to readers), MLA style, approximately 12–15 pages including works cited to: Linda Calendrillo, Co-Editor, JAEPL, Department of English, 600 Lincoln Avenue, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL 61920, e-mail: cfltc@eiu.edu.

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