This column focuses on transitional chapter books for beginning readers. Roser, Martinez, McDonnold, and Fuhrken (2004) wrote that transitional chapter books “are intended to ease the picture book to chapter book transition, filling a niche for young or developing readers who are not yet ready to attempt more complex chapter books” (p. 308). Transitional books usually have a number of common characteristics, such as a table of contents, larger font sizes, brief chapters with some illustrations interspersed throughout, and around 100 pages of text. Some transitional chapter books, such as those in the Ling and Ting series by Grace Lin, are aimed at children in first grade, while others, like those in the Dymondé Daniel series by Nikki Grimes, are aimed at children in grades 2–3. Fictional transitional chapter books tend to focus on topics that are important in the lives of young children, such as fitting in, friendship, birthdays, and school-related events (e.g., field day, substitute teachers, spelling bees, school plays, etc.). In this column, we have also included informational texts aimed at young readers that will provide them with opportunities to navigate their distinct features (e.g., topical vocabulary, glossaries, labels, and diagrams).

When many teachers and librarians think about transitional chapter books, the classic Frog and Toad series by Arnold Lobel may come to mind. These transitional chapter books have stood the test of time and rightfully so. In fact, HarperCollins recently published a collection of all 4 books in the series titled *Frog and Toad: Storybook Treasury*. However, transitional chapter books have historically offered few choices featuring protagonists of color. McNair and Brooks (2012) have noted this void, saying, “[A]lthough multiracial texts have grown in popularity, the number of transitional chapter books produced is still relatively small” (p. 576). We made a concerted effort to include transitional chapter books written by authors of color. We anticipate that, after reading this column, teachers will continue to use the Frog and Toad series, while also making room to include some of the lesser-known transitional chapter books featured here.

References


Halfway to Perfect: A Dymondé Daniel Book

Written by Nikki Grimes
Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

“You’d never know it to look at her skinny little self, but Dymondé loves food.
If there were a class in eating, she’d get an A plus every time. Dyamonde treats all food fairly. She likes Mexican tacos, Chinese egg rolls, and Cuban beans and rice. She eats beef hot dogs, turkey burgers, and fried chicken. . . . And she loves fruit—especially peaches, cherries, and grapes of any size or color” (pp. 1–2). Dyamonde Daniel is a likeable third-grader with a friend named Damaris. Lately, Dyamonde has noticed a change in Damaris’s eating habits as well as her attitude toward food. Damaris has also lost weight. It seems that several of the girls in Dyamonde’s class (including the Three T’s: Tanya, Tylisha, and Tameeka) are paying a lot of attention to weight and outward appearances and sometimes make fun of their peers about this. When one of their classmates named Amberline faints during school, Dyamonde and Damaris discover that she has diabetes. They also learn that because of her condition, Amberline has to take insulin and be extra careful about what she eats and when.

Dyamonde and Damaris both realize that they have their health to be thankful for and that they don’t need to spend their time worrying about what others think of their outward appearance and their size. When Dyamonde says, “I don’t have diabetes, so I can eat whatever I want and I don’t have to think about it,” (p. 101) her mother tells her that this is not really true and reminds her that there are some things Dyamonde and her friend can and should do—such as eating vegetables, drinking enough water, and getting the proper amount of rest.

*Halfway to Perfect* is a welcome addition to the Dyamonde Daniel series. R. Gregory Christie’s black-and-white illustrations add a whimsical touch and convey the range of emotions expressed by the characters throughout the story. Other books in this charming series by Nikki Grimes include *Make Way for Dyamonde Daniel* (2009), *Rich: A Dyamonde Daniel Book* (2009), and *Almost Zero: A Dyamonde Daniel Book* (2010). (JCM)
Cammuso’s energetic, black-ink drawings, with shades of green the only touch of color, greatly enhance the humor. Salem’s lightning-bolt pigtails and Whammy’s bowler hat and bow tie signal their differences—but the true test of friendship is reaching across differences and appreciating one another. Cammuso brings this point home, with no didacticism in sight. The second book, titled The Misadventures of Salem Hyde: Big Birthday Bash (2014), furthers Whammy’s and Salem’s misadventures, complete with fresh misunderstandings, a botched birthday shopping trip, and new literary references (to O. Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi”). It looks like it will be another magical ride. (KJM)

Ling & Ting Share a Birthday
Written and illustrated by Grace Lin

“Ling and Ting are twins. They share many things. They share the same dark eyes. They share the same blue dresses. They also share the same birthday!” (p. 2). And so begins this book featuring six stories with titles such as “Birthday Shoes,” “Birthday Shopping,” and “Birthday Gifts.” In the first story, the twins receive a pair of birthday shoes as a gift, but one pair is green and the other pair is red. Since Ling and Ting like to share everything (including the same shoe color), they decide to wear mismatched shoes. In another story, the twins go shopping for gifts for each other and end up choosing items that they would like to have themselves. Ling chooses a book for Ting, and Ting selects a toy for Ling. Readers who are familiar with other titles by Grace Lin will notice some of them (e.g., Where the Mountain Meets the Moon, The Year of the Dog, and The Year of the Rat) on the shelves in the bookstore that Ling visits. Once they meet up after having purchased these gifts for one another, “Ling and Ting look at each other. They walk home. They do not share their secrets. But they do share the same secret smiles” (p. 14).

Lin’s writing is aimed at students who are just moving into chapter books. Her artist’s note at the end of the book reads, “The images and clothing were inspired by 1950s children’s textbook illustrations, though interpreted with my own modern take” (p. 44). Readers who enjoy this story might also enjoy Ling & Ting: Not Exactly the Same (2010), winner of a Geisel Honor and the first book about these twins. (JCM)

Deadliest Animals
Written by Melissa Stewart

On the front cover, a snarling lion with jagged teeth and menacing eyes looks as if it is ready to attack. Curious children will turn the page to learn that this powerful predator skillfully stalks its prey and is able to take down animals ten times its size. Brilliant colorful photographs accompany the text revealing a pride of lions eating a meal. But is the lion the deadliest beast in the world? The use of questions and text boxes invites children to keep reading to find out the different surprises in our natural world. Some deadly animals are smaller than the palm of our hand. Other deadly animals only eat plants. And a few deadly animals live closer to us than we think. The definition of a “deadly animal” is continually revised as the book discusses other fascinating species, including polar bears, snakes, stonefish, frogs, and more.

Yellow yield signs disclose supplementary information, and headstones tell the number of people who die from each animal. Sporadic jokes give some comic relief with more weird facts.
revealed in orange text boxes. Kids will definitely wince when they read about honeybees and the practice of bee bearding. Another fascinating animal is the puffer fish that has enough toxin to kill 30 people, yet is a delicacy in some countries. On the last page, the deadliest animal is revealed—a pesky little insect with a whiny hum! This intriguing nonfiction text contains a table of contents, brief chapters, headings, photo captions, a picture glossary, and an index. Deadliest Animals is part of a series called National Geographic Super Readers that contains books for pre-readers to fluent readers with titles such as Volcanoes! (Schreiber, 2008), Frogs (Carney, 2009), and Sharks (Schreiber, 2008). All of the books are engaging, exciting, and educational. (DD)

Good Luck Anna Hibiscus!
Written by Atinuke
Illustrated by Lauren Tobia

This delightful collection of realistic fiction stories centers on the adventures of Anna Hibiscus, a curious and relatable little girl growing up in “Africa. Amazing Africa” (p. 7). Anna Hibiscus lives with her twin baby brothers (appropriately named Double and Trouble), parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Together, they care for their home, nestled in a busy seaside city filled with markets, lagoons, roads, skyscrapers, and shanty towns. In this urban African setting, Anna encounters many an adventure and lessons that take her anywhere from the beautiful garden in her backyard (Anna Hibiscus, 2010) to Canada (Have Fun Anna Hibiscus!, 2010) where her mother was born.

Good Luck Anna Hibiscus! (2010) is the third in this series of stories about Anna’s adventures. This chapter book begins as the dusty African

The Notebook of Doom: Day of the Night Crawlers
Written and illustrated by Troy Cummings
Scholastic, 2013, 92 pp., ISBN 978-0-545-49324-6

Written for independent readers, the simple chapter books in this new series are part mystery, part fantasy, and part hilarious. The easy-to-read text, quick action, and exaggerated illustrations will appeal to both boys and girls. In one scene, it is raining nonstop and the sidewalks are covered with long, pink, wiggly worms. The night crawlers leave a secret message, but Alexander is unable to read cursive. With the help of an old notebook, Alexander and his friends Rip and Nikki seek to save their town from the small blue megaworms that travel alone and grow as large as a school bus when sunlight hits them. The black-and-white illustrations present the characters with large expressive eyes and small bodies in a comic-like style.

The plot thickens when the friends’ P.E. teacher disappears and a mysterious substitute teacher named Miss Gill refuses to take off her mask. Then they notice small mounds of dirt popping up everywhere, and the friends wonder if a monster attack is inevitable. Fortunately, Alexander does what any good detective would do—he makes a list of the signs and the questions he still has—in order to help them think clearly. Chapter titles such as, “Sword of a Big Deal” and “Flop Quiz” help make this book even more entertaining. In the end, a yo-yo, a ski pole, and a feather help the youngsters defend their town from the monster invasion. In addition, the children learn more information about the Notebook of Doom. For more monster adventures, children will want to read other books in this series that are subtitled Rise of the Balloon Goons (2013) and Attack of the Shadow Smashers (2013). (DD)
wind known as the Harmattan has blown sand from the Sahara Desert all over the city. This is very different than what Anna will experience in Canada when she visits her grandmother for the first time. The whole family wants to make sure that Anna stays warm for her big trip abroad, so they take her to buy warm clothes in the middle of their spicy and hot African summer days. More important, her family helps her to say goodbye and they wish her luck.

Lauren Tobia’s detailed, pencil sketches extend author Atinuke’s compelling writing, which artfully represents unique African dialects in dialogue. Together, the written text and illustrations animate Anna’s relationship with her caring family and her beloved African landscapes. These chapter books not only provide young readers with an admirable character to relate to, but also open readers to Anna’s world of a large, loving family in an urban African context. (AZ)

**Missy’s Super Duper Royal Deluxe: School Play**
*Written and illustrated by Susan Nees*

No one can fill a room with more sparkle and energy than Melissa Abigail Rose, or as her friends and family call her, “Missy.” Readers of *Missy’s Super Duper Royal Deluxe* series will meet one spunky girl with a way of always doing things differently than everyone else and a way of making every day super duper royal deluxe! Missy takes to the stage in the third book in the series. Her class is putting on a play about George Washington Carver. Missy, naturally, wants the most exciting part and dreams of twirling in the spotlight. But Missy not only does not get a main part, she does not even get a speaking part. While others seem okay with being cast as one of many peanuts in the singing chorus, Missy does not. By the end, Missy does what she does best—she turns her part into the most super duper royal deluxe part ever!

Nees’s full-color illustrations appear on every page and animate Missy’s pluck and energy for the business of elementary school. The integration of speech bubbles helps this transitional chapter book read as a graphic novel. With entertaining characters, fast-paced plots, and vivid drawings, these books will encourage readers to find ways to make each day a super duper royal deluxe day. Other titles in this series include *Missy’s Super Duper Royal Deluxe: Class Pets* (2013) and *Missy’s Super Duper Royal Deluxe: Picture Day* (2013). (AZ)

**Boris for the Win**
*Written and illustrated by Andrew Joyner*
Scholastic, 2011, 73 pp., ISBN 978-0-545-48448-0

“Meet Boris. He’s a lot like you” (p. 1). The accompanying illustration shows Boris with straggly hair and a long snout. He is carrying all of his favorites—backpack, magnifying glass, book, snack, and yo-yo. The introduction explains that Boris is a dreamer who fantasizes about big leaps, big tricks, and big treasure. With Boris around there is no need to be bored because he is going to take readers “up in the clouds, into a pyramid, or maybe just around the corner” (p. 8). *Boris for the Win* is part of an easy-to-read series with brief chapters, fast-paced plots, comic-like illustrations on every page, and interesting layouts that include speech bubbles. The other Boris books are *Boris Sees the Light* (2011), *Boris on the Move* (2011), and *Boris Gets a Lizard* (2011).

The entire series is geared for children who are beginning to read independently and contains...
topics to which they can easily relate. In *Boris for the Win*, for example, the students are practicing and preparing for the school’s field day. One of Boris’s classmates, Eddie, is athletic and able to run faster and jump higher than anyone. Boris and his pals are disappointed that they always lose. They devise a top-secret training plan in hopes that they will become winners. When field day arrives, Boris jumps high and clears hurdles, yet Eddie continues to beat him. Then it is time for the round-the-track marathon. Boris and Eddie run neck and neck and amazingly Boris is able to pass him. But Boris looks back and notices one of his training partners is lagging behind because he has hay fever. Boris runs back to help his friend cross the finish line and something surprising occurs.

With the themes of preparation, perseverance, and friendship, this is a winning book. Each Boris title concludes with step-by-step instructions for children to complete an activity at home. These adventure-filled transitional chapter books are fast and fun to read. (DD)

**Nikki & Deja:**

**Substitute Trouble**

Written by Karen English
Illustrated by Laura Freeman

When Nikki and Deja arrive at George Washington Carver Elementary School one morning, they notice that their teacher, Ms. Shelby-Ortiz, is absent. Instead, there is a substitute named Mr. Willow. They are told that Ms. Shelby-Ortiz broke her ankle and will be out for two to three weeks. Some of the students proceed to give the substitute a difficult time by creating distractions such as not sitting in their assigned seats and coordinating when to cough and drop their textbooks on the floor. The substitute eventually leaves and is replaced by another named Mr. Blaggart who acts like a drill sergeant. He makes the students run laps before school and he doesn’t give them a choice of what to write about in their journals. Plus he reads the newspaper during class! Nikki and Deja know that this is not acceptable and that Ms. Shelby-Ortiz would never do this. The one thing that keeps the girls upbeat is the fact that Deja has a new puppy named Ms. Precious Penelope. They enjoy walking her after school and caring for her while doing their homework.

Karen English, a former third-grade teacher, knows how young children talk and feel, and this authenticity permeates the text. Freeman’s illustrations are interspersed throughout the book and provide key pictures of pivotal scenes and events. Other books in this likeable series include *Nikki & Deja* (2007), *Nikki & Deja: Birthday Blues* (2009), *Nikki & Deja: The Newsy Newsletter* (2010), *Nikki & Deja: Election Madness* (2011), and *Nikki & Deja: Wedding Drama* (2012). Karen English has a new series debuting in 2014 and the first book is titled *Dog Days: The Carver Chronicles*. The main character is a boy named Gavin and he, too, attends George Washington Carver Elementary School and is in the same classroom as Nikki and Deja. (JCM)

**Monkey Me and the Golden Monkey**

Written and illustrated by Timothy Roland

A combined narrative chapter book and graphic novel, *Monkey Me and the Golden Monkey* offers primary grade readers a likeable sibling pair—Clyde, a young boy with hyperkinetic tendencies, and his twin sister Claudia, who tries to keep him out of trouble. When Clyde’s head starts to spin, Claudia knows his excitement has reached its peak, so she sticks...
close by his side. She cannot save him from himself, however, when on a school field trip to the local science museum, Clyde quickly eats an irradiated banana. This impulsive act is a good thing for readers, however, as that banana brings out the monkey in Clyde and turns him into the series’ title character.

Part sibling adventure, part mystery, part comedic mix-up, the plot of the initial volume revolves around a run-in between Clyde and a supposed museum security guard during a class field trip that involves a set of Golden Monkey figures—one a solid gold sculpted ornament displayed as an objet d’art and the other Clyde’s plastic replica from the gift shop. The book offers a quick-moving plot and simple but expressive black ink illustrations. Clyde’s monkey phases are told in full graphic-panel format, enhancing the excitement of the madcap, super-power-enhanced escapades.

The siblings clearly have a close relationship. Claudia shows genuine concern for her hyperactive brother, displaying humor at his antics and refraining from being overbearing or bossy. Clyde appreciates his sister’s common sense, acknowledging with ironic wit that “my sister was right. Like usual” (p. 13) about the dangers of eating that banana. He values her protective instincts and bravery, especially when she faces down the bully Roz. When Clyde develops the ability to change into a monkey, Claudia keeps his secret and supports him. Claudia solves one mystery—what happened to Clyde—while Clyde solves the other—what happened to the Golden Monkey. They praise each other’s part in contributing to the book’s resolution.

Two volumes in this series have been published. In *Monkey Me and the Pet Show* (2014), the second book, readers get a short recap of Clyde’s transformation story, run into bully Roz again, and learn that the school administration is still trying to find that monkey on the loose. Between trying to keep Clyde’s monkey-self a secret after he is accidentally photographed, and solving the fresh mystery of the missing pets, the siblings are off on a new and equally thrilling adventure. (KJM)}

**Mika: My New Life**
Written and illustrated by Kyla May

Life on Lotus Lane is a busy one for Kiki and her best friends, Coco, Lulu, and new neighbor Mika. These BFFL (BFFL=Best Friends For Life) attend Amber Acres Elementary School and have their very own club, LLGC (LLGC=Lotus Lane Girls Club). Each of the four books in the Lotus Lane series is written as a diary filled with playful illustrations and doodles on every page. As the best of friends, the girls do everything together; they formed their club to make crafts, bake, have sleepovers, and so much more. They also meet to make sure Katy Krupski, a schoolmate nicknamed “the Queen of Mean” (p. 12), does not stir up trouble (as usual!).

The first book, titled *Kiki: My Stylish Life* (2013) is written from Kiki’s perspective. The second and third books in the series are titled *Coco: My Delicious Life* (2013) and *Lulu: My Glamorous Life* (2013). Readers will learn that Kiki loves designing awesome outfits, hanging out with friends, and collecting fun facts about her life on Lotus Lane. Coco enjoys baking and helping animals, while Lulu likes giving her BFFL makeovers and reading about movie stars.

In this fourth book in the series, *Mika: My New Life*, the newest resident of Lotus Lane is turning everything upside down. Shy, hip-hop-loving Mika hails from Japan and is pleased to make new friends so quickly, including Katy Krupski. Kiki, Coco, and Lulu officially invite Mika to join the Lotus Lane Girls Club and plan a surprise pajama party to welcome her to the club. Afterward though, Mika struggles to make time for all of the LLGC goings-on as she works to meet the school newspaper deadline and continues her friendship with Katy. This story of three best friends and one new girl trying to find ways to fit in and be...
true to themselves results in a misinterpretation of events but also an eventual understanding and friendship—a plot that may prove to be a familiar experience for young readers. Each diary is designed to reflect the girls’ individual interests and personalities through Kyla May’s unique illustrations. Young readers will want to read all four books for a glimpse into the lives of the Lotus Lane Girls: Kiki, Coco, Lulu, and Mika. (AZ)

Much of the humor in this delightful series comes from Clementine’s good intentions and ability to reflect on—and sometimes control—her impulsiveness. When her science teacher asks if anyone has questions, Clementine thinks: “I sure did. I wanted to ask, ‘You call this a science room?’” But instead, I just said, ‘Excuse me, I think there’s been a mistake,’ in my most polite voice” (p. 8). Clementine’s catch phrase “Okay, fine!” never fails to entertain: “My inside clock keeps perfect time, so I am never late for anything. Okay, fine, I’m late a lot, but it’s only because I forget to set my inside clock” (p. 15).

The series contrasts Clementine’s lower socioeconomic status—living with her artist mother and building-superintendent father in the building’s basement apartment—with her friend Margaret’s wealthier, condo-owning mother. What Clementine lacks financially, however, she more than makes up in the depth of her relationships and her comfort in her highly individual skin. Margaret, on the other hand, is obsessive-compulsive, germ-phobic, bossy, and overly rule-focused. However, Margaret shows herself to be a vulnerable friend (e.g., when she worries about participatory activities in Clementine and the Spring Trip, 2013) and a true friend in times of need (e.g., when Clementine’s cat named Moisturizer goes missing in Clementine, Friend of the Week, 2010).

Pennypacker has created a modern, plucky main character who means well, but whose unique way of seeing the world lands her in situations that engender expansive humor even as they require a mix of insight and creative thinking to resolve. Frazee, the series illustrator, highlights key moments in her fresh, pen-and-ink drawings. All young readers deserve to meet—and relish—the one-of-a-kind Clementine! (KJM)

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