

Read-Aloud Book Retreat

Spring
2006

The more you read, the more you know.
The more you know, the smarter you grow.
The smarter you are, the longer you stay in school.
The longer you stay in school, the more diplomas you earn...
The more diplomas you earn, the longer you live.

Jim Trelease **The Read-Aloud Book** (Penguin, '01)

Thank you...

authors for creating,
and publishers for
supplying these excellent
tools to entice our
children to love reading.

Young Adult

Barry Denenberg, who wrote previously for the *Dear America* and *My Name Is America* series, is the author of many high caliber books written expressly for young adults. His latest book, **Shadow Life: A portrait of Anne Frank and Her Family** (Scholastic, '05) is nothing short of compelling. In the first chapters of the book Denenberg describes the pre-World War II Germany in which the Frank family lived. The next section, "Hiding," is a fictional diary that evolves through Anne's sister Margot's perspective.

Part three, "Dying," describes daily life in the concentration camps, and "Surviving" reports many statistics—some quite startling—about the camps themselves. Denenberg provides an extensive bibliography and videography for those who want to read further on this well documented topic. This book should be at the top of the list for those studying the Holocaust; also for those today questioning whether this genocide took place. It is a powerful book, difficult to put down.

Absolutely, Positively Not (Arthur Levine Books, '05) is the sometimes riotously funny book about the life of a 16 year-old who is sure in the first chapter that he is absolutely, positively NOT gay. By book's end he is absolutely, positively sure he is gay. His best friend Rachael is not surprised when he expresses to her the thought he might possibly be gay. She's sure of it and has been all along. After all, didn't he go to a dance with a golden retriever rather than admit to his mother he didn't have a date?! This first novel by David LaRochelle handles the topic of homosexuality with warmth and understanding. The psychological dimension—the uncertainty, then the inkling, then the self-discovery—is also superbly presented. Adolescents will find this novel, because of the author's style and wit, an amusing “coming of age” portrait; they also will find it thought provoking, and will gain insight from reading it.

Middle School and Young Adult

In Dan Gutman's **Race for the Sky: *The Kitty Hawk Diaries of Johnny Moore*** (Simon & Schuster, 2003) 14 year-old Johnny Moore shares his personal observations and experiences as assistant to those two “dingbatters” from Ohio, Orville and Wilbur Wright. As an eyewitness to the first flight, the teen's account is actually a chronicle of the team's three-year

struggle to succeed. Gutman's enthusiastic narrator recounts his tale using regionalisms that carry the reader back to the Kill Devil Hills in North Carolina at the beginning of the 20th century. This work of historical fiction brings the challenge, struggle and drama of first flight to vivid life for the Middle School and young adult reader.

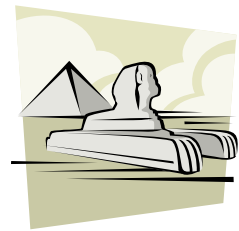
Another selection about the Wright Brothers:

We tend to associate the Wright brothers only with their famous first flight in 1903 at Kitty Hawk, but there is much more to their story.



Touching the Sky: *The Flying Adventures of Wilbur and Orville Wright* (Margaret K. McElderry Books, '03) by Louise Borden and Trish Marx describes many of their later accomplishments. For example, during the September 1909 New York City Commemorative celebration Wilbur was asked to give a flying exhibition. This was the first time most people had seen a flying machine. Huge crowds gathered to see the flight and were enthralled by what must have seemed to them science fiction. At virtually the same moment in Europe, Orville was making public flights trying to attract possible investors to forming a manufacturing company. In the course of these flights this adventurous brother set many records

of the day. He made the first night flight, the longest flight, the highest flight and even flew with the Crown Prince of Germany as his passenger. This book allows the reader to be a spectator at an important moment in history, while also learning something of the individual personalities of these amazing brothers, and of their less well-known accomplishments.



Teachers designing units focusing on the life and culture of the Ancient Egyptians will delight Middle School students by introducing them to **Secrets of the Sphinx** (Scholastic, '03) by James Cross Giblin. Ibatouline's magnificent watercolor illustrations draw the reader into the mysteries and history, the facts and myths surrounding the fantastical creature standing guard over the pyramids in the Giza Plateau. This rich, non-fiction text covers its topic well, and will mesmerize Egyptologists, both young and old!

Barbara Kerley's appealing biography of one of America's most beloved poets, **Walt Whitman: Words for America** (Scholastic, '04), presents a compassionate portrait of Whitman during the Civil War years. Densely illustrated by Brian Selznick, with numerous

excerpts from the poet's work interspersed, the narrative reveals Whitman's empathy, respect, and fondness for President Lincoln and the pride the poet felt for his country, along with his abhorrence of slavery. English teachers could well use this biography to create a context in which to read more of Whitman's work, and to prompt a study of his personality and character. History teachers will find it an absorbing study of the age.

Upper Elementary

Another book relating to Whitman, pointing up a different facet of his poetry's influence.....

Loren Long's illustrated interpretation of the Whitman poem **When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer** (Simon & Schuster, '04) depicts a young boy's fascination with the stars in the night sky. This vision contrasts with the boy's visit to the planetarium and his attendance at the astronomer's lecture, both of which struck him as dull. A discussion of the poem and the boy's vision offers an opportunity for young readers to consider the power of the



imagination. It also offers the chance to appreciate Whitman's ability to evoke, and supremely, to inspire.

Ride Like the Wind: A Tale of the Pony Express (Blue Sky Press, '04) brings to life this fascinating yet brief period of American history, and *is* brought to life by Bernie Fuchs' wonderfully vibrant oil paintings. The story centers on fictional Johnny Free, an orphan who becomes a rider for the Pony Express. The tale of his adventures and the dangers he encounters on the trail capture and compel the reader to read on. Fuchs mixes in historical information such as the tension between the Piute tribe and the settlers, bringing added excitement and an element of suspense to the story. Horse lovers will appreciate the special bond between Johnny and his horse, Jenny Soo, who saves his life. Dates and other factual details are included both before and after the story, assuring that this book will appeal to a wide range of ages as both fiction and a chronicle of the period.

When school becomes challenging we all need a friend like **Danitra Brown, Class Clown** (Harper Collins, '05). This book of poems by Nikki Grimes tells of a very special friendship between Zuri and Danitra. Zuri faces challenges of many kinds through the school year, but Danitra is there to help her in every situation and to make her problems disappear. She encourages Zuri to believe in herself and to be proud of who she is. Danitra is a wonderful character who is never afraid to be herself, or to stand out in a

crowd. She is a "model" character that young readers will enjoy discussing.

Alley Oops (Flashlight Press, '05) by Janice Levy approaches the topic of bullying in a clever and unique way. J.J. gets in trouble when he is caught bullying Patrick, the new boy in school. Instead of lecturing, J.J.'s father shares with him that he had himself been a bully as a boy. He remarks that later, when he encountered the person as an adult that he had bullied in school, Mr. Jax finally came to understand how cruel he had been, and how much he had affected the man's life. When J.J. meets Patrick again afterward he discovers they do have a lot in common after all, and they become friends. The story is fast paced and moves quickly from the potentially threatening stage to some humorous episodes the two new friends share, and it offers an unusual approach—and an appealing solution—to the problem of bullying. Sad to say, many children will be able to relate to the bullying theme; this book can perhaps bring them hope, and show them a novel way possibly of coping.

How about taking your students on a field trip to Australia?! In **Top to Bottom Down Under** (Harper Collins, '05) Ted and Betsey Lewis lead us on a



tour from the top of Australia to the bottom. The two Caldecott Honor artists mix realistic, detailed watercolor pictures with playful sketches. The tour is given in a humorous, anecdotal way that makes the reader feel as if traveling along with them, and quite comfortable in the voyage. Information on Australian animals and the landscape is mixed in with examples of Australian slang. It's a bonzer read! And sure to please.

The story of the subway's history from London's unique underground to New York City's serpentine network is the topic of Larry Dane Brimner's **Subway: The Story of Tunnels, Tubes, and Tracks** (Boyd's Mills Press, '04). Illustrator Neil Waldman's delineates the historical context and portrays important personalities who contributed to the invention and construction of this unique form of public transportation. Sidebars present additional facts about related elements such as the tube, the token, and the "Chunnel" connecting England and France. This is a fascinating account of a subject infrequently studied. Readers interested in the topic will find this work absorbing.

Joe Louis: America's Fighter (Harcourt, Inc., '05) by David A. Adler is more than just the biography of the famous boxer; it is

the story of a period in American culture, and of one man's rise to success against daunting odds. Joseph Lewis Barrow came from a poor family and was born in a time of racial prejudice and segregation. Through his hard work and talent he became heavyweight champion of the world. The story shows how he became first a hero to African Americans and a symbol of hope for his race during the Depression, then later an iconic figure and source of pride to all Americans, regardless of race, when he fought and won against the fighter Max Schmeling of Nazi Germany. Adler conveys clearly Louis's fighting spirit and his unrelenting drive to succeed, and also why he is considered to be among the greatest heavyweight champions ever to enter the ring.

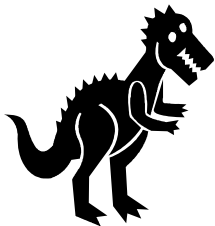
A Bear Named Trouble (Clarion, '05) by Marion Dane Bauer makes a great classroom read-aloud for upper primary and all elementary grades. The story is about a wild bear and a young boy, and is told from both the bear's and boy's points of view. Ten year-old Jonathan lives close to the Alaska Zoo, where his father is a caretaker.



Jonathan loves animals so much he comes to project himself inside their bodies and imagines he can see what they see, and feel what they feel. When Jonathan's favorite zoo creature is accidentally killed by the bear—now named Trouble—Jonathan enlists the aid of the public to get rid of Trouble. Trouble, now, really is in *trouble*! This is an involving animal story (based on an actual incident where a bear really did break into a zoo). The characters, both human and animal, are nicely drawn and believable. It's a great book for young readers, and for all animal lovers.

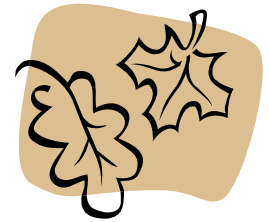
Primary

Who could be a better role model to teach children polite table manners than a dinosaur? Jane Yolen and Mark Teague team up for **How Do Dinosaurs Eat Their Food?** (The Blue Sky Press, '05). All through this humorous rhyming book dinosaurs display every rude behavior a child could possibly think up. The story puts dinosaurs in a house with human parents who are repelled by their poor manners. Readers who look carefully at the illustrations will find each dinosaur's name—in itself a source of fun. Happily, by the end of the book the dinosaurs all show impeccable table manners. So then, who wouldn't want to eat like a dinosaur?



Sample the beauty of autumn in New York State with **Leaf Jumpers** (Charlesbridge, '04), by Carole Gerber. The poetic language and vibrant illustrations demonstrate the joy and beauty of this special season in the Northeast.

The narrative describes the shape and color of a variety of leaves, showing each leaf's unique beauty.



The bright illustrations and short text will appeal to all elementary levels. Of course the best part of fall for kids, as for the narrator of the story, is jumping into a huge pile of leaves and rolling around! An additional page at the end explains what causes the leaves to change color. This is a wonderful book for young readers. It's informative, and its artwork is outstanding.

Watch out! Mr. Frimdimpny is in charge in James Stevenson's book **No Laughing, No Giggling** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, '04) and he's very strict! The book is a collection of short and amusing tales. Readers will want to laugh, but have to be careful. If Mr. Frimdimpny catches anyone laughing they have to go back to the beginning of the story. He keeps a close eye throughout the book—until he decides to take a nap. Then, when he's not paying attention, the other characters come together and tickle him. Poor Mr. Frimdimpny breaks his own rule about

laughing and himself has to go back to the beginning of the book. But the book is fun throughout, so maybe that's not such a bad thing.

Families (Hyperion, '06) by Susan Kuklin is, precisely, a celebration of families. The children of each of the sixteen families portrayed were interviewed by the author and chose the settings in their homes in which to be photographed. These families reflect the cultural diversity in the United States today: mixed-race; families of gay and lesbian couples; large and small families; religious families; families with

adopted children. The one thing the author found in common among all the children interviewed for the book was that each one felt safe, and loved. At three one of the children was asked "What do you think it means to be adopted?" The answer: "Adoption means you get picked up and loved." Be sure to take the time to read **Families**. It is more than just outstanding photographs and interviews. It is inspirational. One feels good after reading the book, and realizes there may be hope for us all, after all.

NYSRA Children's Literature Committee

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