

Book Banter

Fall 2008

Primary

There's a special pebble, small and round and nearly smooth, who feels right at home on the seashore, and enjoys the beautiful sky and the waves, even the crashing breakers during storms. This not-entirely-smooth pebble is tickled by the crabs and warmed by the sun, but is quite sure that there is something more in his future—possibly as part of a huge stone wall, or being used in the construction of a fine building. (Hey...even pebbles can dream, can't they?) Susan Milord's **Pebble** (Harper Collins, '07) is a beautiful little picture book that can be used at all levels, with exquisite collages that evoke memories of the seashore and fittingly support the story. The theme is about belonging. And also about imagining....what great things might be.

Cast a spell with Jack Prelutsky's **The Wizard** (Greenwillow Books, 2007)! This book is a poem introducing the reader to a wizard who changes a frog into many different things through the course of his rhyming stanzas. Prelutsky has a rich imagination, and conjures some mesmerizing scenes. Brandon Dorman's illustrations superbly bring the book to life, with vibrant colors, unusual perspectives and intriguing details all drawing the reader into the wizard's world and holding him spellbound.



Eric Kimmel adaptation of Washington Irving's beloved story of the greatest Sleeper of all time brings a classic tale into the present age. **Rip Van Winkle's Return** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) is a retelling of Irving's classic tale, but with a new perspective: It seems that Rip always managed to find other things to do when he should have been

working. He preferred fishing or going to the tavern over working on his farm. And he always found time to play with the local children. They loved him. But his wife had to keep after him to take care of the farm. One afternoon, while Rip was escaping his wife's nagging, he encountered a group of strangers who generously offered him a drink from their keg. Immediately Rip fell fast asleep. Decades later, his eventual return journey to town and his reaction to the changes that have occurred add dimension to Kimmel's version, along with some enjoyable ironic humor. Rip's remorse over time lost and his attempts to redeem himself will caution Early Elementary readers not to let themselves be idle.

Barbara Joose, the author of *Mama, Do You Love Me?* and *Papa, Do You Love Me?* has created a new tale, this time of grandmotherly love. **Grandma Calls Me Beautiful** (Chronicle Books, '08) is about a grandmother who loves to tell her favorite story—which is the one about first meeting her granddaughter. Grandma named the child *Beautiful*, because she always would be beautiful in her eyes. The book is illustrated by Barbara Lavalley with wonderful water-colors showing scenes from the Hawaiian Islands, intertwined with a child's string game. This is a heart-warming book for grandmothers and granddaughters to share, and to cherish together.

The actress and singer Queen Latifah has continued her support of charities that empower children by writing **Queen of the Scene** (Geringer Books, '06), with proceeds going to worthy causes. The Queen in the story represents all girls and the power they can have. Girls who often are slighted in many activities can, if they try and really want to succeed, become "queen of the scene" whether in basketball, hop scotch, running, stickball, or any other playground activity. This little parable also underscores the old but true adage "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Frank Morrison's bold, colorful artwork adds energy to the dynamics of this Elementary-level picture book.

Intermediate

A Crooked Kind of Perfect by Linda Urban (Harcourt, 2007) is the perfect Intermediate book for children who are trying desperately to find their own niche.

When your dream is to give a piano concert in Carnegie Hall wearing a beautiful ball gown with a tiara and as yet you don't even own a piano, you have a dilemma any ten year-old can understand.



Add to the mix a workaholic mother and a dad who seems only to be happy taking correspondence courses at home, and things get still more complicated. Urban

does an excellent job of portraying the black and white world of Fifth-Graders, where best friends and used-to-be best friends, and lunch-room seating and those strange creatures called boys send you swinging from the heights of joy to the lows of despair.

Zoe Elias is the unforgettable heroine, plunking away on her Perfectone-D60 electric organ (which is a "not really" piano), struggling to find her place in the world. This is an affective book, with a thought-provoking story line.

Sara is fed up with the games and traditions at her family's Chanukah party. Everything is always so predictable. What Sara really wants is a beautiful Christmas tree, like 'everyone else.' "Dreydls are boring," comments Sara.

Then Aunt Mariam arrives with a big shiny, gold dreydl just for Sara. It turns out that this special dreydl is really an enchanted princess who takes Sara into a magical world filled with demons, biblical characters, and strange traveling companions.



Ellen Kushner weaves threads of Jewish folklore and tradition in with fantasy and humor. **The Golden Dreydl** (Charlesbridge, '08) is a great book to share with elementary children during the holidays. Ilene Winn-

Lederer's complex pen and ink drawings add charm and allure to the fantasy.

Young Adult

In Laura Williams McCaffrey's fantasy novel, **Water Shaper** (Clarion Books, 2006), Margot feels different from those who live in her father's castle. Her dark hair and light skin make her stand out from the others. She resembles her mother, who died when she was three. Her mother came from a far away kingdom to the west, off by the sea, where magical people all knew the secrets of the deep. Margot wishes to escape from her father's landlocked kingdom and get to the Western Islands so she can find and live with others who share her love of water. The trip is far and dangerous because of Demon Spirits who come out at night. Only the magic of Holy Men can protect travelers. Margot finally finds a westerner—Orrin,

King of Maw—who also loves water, and will help her return to the Sea. Orrin offers to let her live in his kingdom under his



protection. Margot, however, is hiding a secret. In a world where only men can be magical, her own growing magic powers and the enchanted *Book of the Sea* that she finds drive our young heroine to explore her destiny. And there may be other problems lurking. Margot views Orrin as her savior, but he may not be as wonderful as he appears. (Stay tuned!) This is a richly plotted tale, with a likable lead character and new turns occurring in every section. It will attract and hold the interest of young readers, and absorb them into McCaffrey's engrossing world.

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