

Children's Books

Creativity



Cyndi Giorgis, Nancy J. Johnson

Today in living rooms and labs, women are inventing. They are combining their natural curiosity and creativity with persistence and optimism. They are imagining. They are thinking and talking. "What if?" they ask. "How about?" they wonder. "Ah-ha!" they exclaim. And gradually their ingenuity emerges. An inventiveness that touches all our lives, and perhaps energizes our own creativity—women and men, girls and boys alike.

(Thimmesh, 2000, p. 7)

Children's literature is inherently creative on many levels. First is the creative ability of an author to write in ways that can be humorous, poetic, realistic, fanciful, or informative. Then an illustrator contributes imaginative images that extend the text by constructing meaning through art or complement the story line in ways that directly relate to the text.

Literature also develops and supports the creativity of its readers. Well-written stories, poems, and illustrations foster children's imaginations as they interpret what they read and see. In turn, children can create their own stories verbally, in writing, and through illustration, with books providing the inspiration.

This month's column features books that focus on creativity, imagination, and innovation. Some stories may reveal characters who respond creatively to a situation or problem, express themselves through creative outlets, or envi-

sion how to achieve a goal in a unique manner. Others will generate questions for readers to explore as they inquire about their world.

Visual creativity

Artists create fine art for picture books and exhibit their work in museums, galleries, or other outlets. Whether they are painters, sculptors, architects, or photographers, all express creativity through the use of patterns, colors, shapes, space, lines, or other elements of art.

Ellen Stoll Walsh creates movement using complementary colors that vibrate and quiver in *Mouse Magic*. The Wizard shows a young mouse named Kit what happens when colors opposite each other on the color wheel are paired together—green with red, orange with blue, or purple with yellow. The patterned designs appear to move on the page, but Kit realizes that the real magic is in the pairing of the colors rather than the Wizard's abilities. Bright cut-paper collage illustrations create personable characters and optical illusions that provide a visual treat for young readers. An author's note and color wheel explaining primary, secondary, and complementary colors will prompt readers to create their own visual magic.

In *Squeaking of Art: The Mice Go to the Museum*, readers join 10 young mice as they visit imaginary galleries to learn about some of the world's

greatest paintings. The art on each double-page spread is grouped by subjects such as music and dance, children playing, abstract art, or landscapes. A framed block of text on the gallery wall provides information about the paintings, while text at the bottom of the page contains engaging questions and ongoing commentary from the mice. Monica Wellington's own versions of over 75 paintings appear in vivid, graphic style. A two-page appendix lists each original work of art, the artist's name, and the location where it is exhibited. This playful approach to art provides a unique introduction to both museums and famous paintings.

During his illustrious career as an architect, Frank O. Gehry's designs have ranged from innovative cardboard furniture to buildings that surge with movement and energy. Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan's *Frank O. Gehry: Outside In* profiles the childhood and career of a man greatly influenced by his Polish grandparents and often misunderstood by neighbors and critics. The accessible text is coupled with sidebar information, quotes from Gehry, a glossary of terms, and a listing of locations where completed buildings and those in progress can be found. Dramatic photographs of Gehry's work such as the Loyola University Law School in Boston, Massachusetts (which was inspired by the Roman Forum in Italy); the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain

(that Gehry used a three-dimensional imaging computer program to design); and an inventive office building in Venice, California (known as the Binoculars Building) are also included. This interesting biographical book pays tribute to a visionary builder.

Biographer Beverly Gherman offers readers of all ages a glimpse into the life and work of an American painter with a distinctive style and widespread appeal in *Norman Rockwell: Storyteller With a Brush*. Biographical details are woven skillfully into the exploration of Rockwell's techniques, models, and imagery. During his career, Rockwell captured the essence of American culture and provided a historical perspective from the First World War into the late 1960s. The book's large format incorporates generous amounts of white space that complement the well-chosen full color reproductions and intriguing black-and-white photos. The man known for his popular *Saturday Evening Post* magazine covers is portrayed as a passionate painter who was adored by the public but largely ignored by critics of the time.

The human dimension of Leonardo da Vinci is revealed along with the many facts of his life and accomplishments in Guido Visconti's *The Genius of Leonardo*. Visconti's narrative reveals details of this great artist's character and talent by incorporating quotes from da Vinci. The inclusion of the 10-year-old character of Giacomo—da Vinci's unruly young apprentice who is in awe of his master's talent—adds charm, mischief, and a youthful perspective. Bimba Landmann's richly mysterious paintings are interspersed with many of da Vinci's original sketches and offer a fascinating exploration of the many facets of genius—artist, mapmaker, architect, engineer, musician, and dreamer.

Creative expression

People in real life and characters in books express themselves in various ways—art, drama, movement, or language. How persons or characters use their talents can offer unique ways of presenting their individuality. Creative expression provides an outlet to communicate interests, abilities, ideas, and personality.

Seven-year-old McKenzie Foster presents readers with the grueling but fulfilling world of gymnastics in *I Am a Gymnast*, the third installment in the Young Dreamers series, written and photographed by Jane Feldman. After introducing her teammates and coaches, her family and mentors, McKenzie shares the rigors of daily practice along with the thrilling experiences of performing at Rockefeller Center and meeting renowned coach Bela Karolyi and Olympic gold medalists Shannon Miller and Dominique Dawes. Accompanied by over 75 color and black-and-white photographs, this first-person narrative chronicles the hours of intense work and excitement experienced by this young rhythmic gymnast, capturing her enthusiasm for the sport and her dream of one day becoming an Olympic competitor.

Kathryn Lasky's *First Painter* is "an imaginative reconstruction...of the birth of the artistic imagination" and focuses on early cave paintings. After Mishoo's mother dies, the adolescent girl becomes the new shaman who must discover a way to help her starving prehistoric tribe

C Crazy, kooky, colorful papers
 R ridiculous and incredible ideas and writing
 E entertaining and exciting investigations
 A awesome Art's
 T terrific talents
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 I imaginative endeavors and quests
 T talented students
 Y your self and your work

Ms. Jordan's 5th grade class
 Selma Bartlett Elementary
 Henderson, Nevada

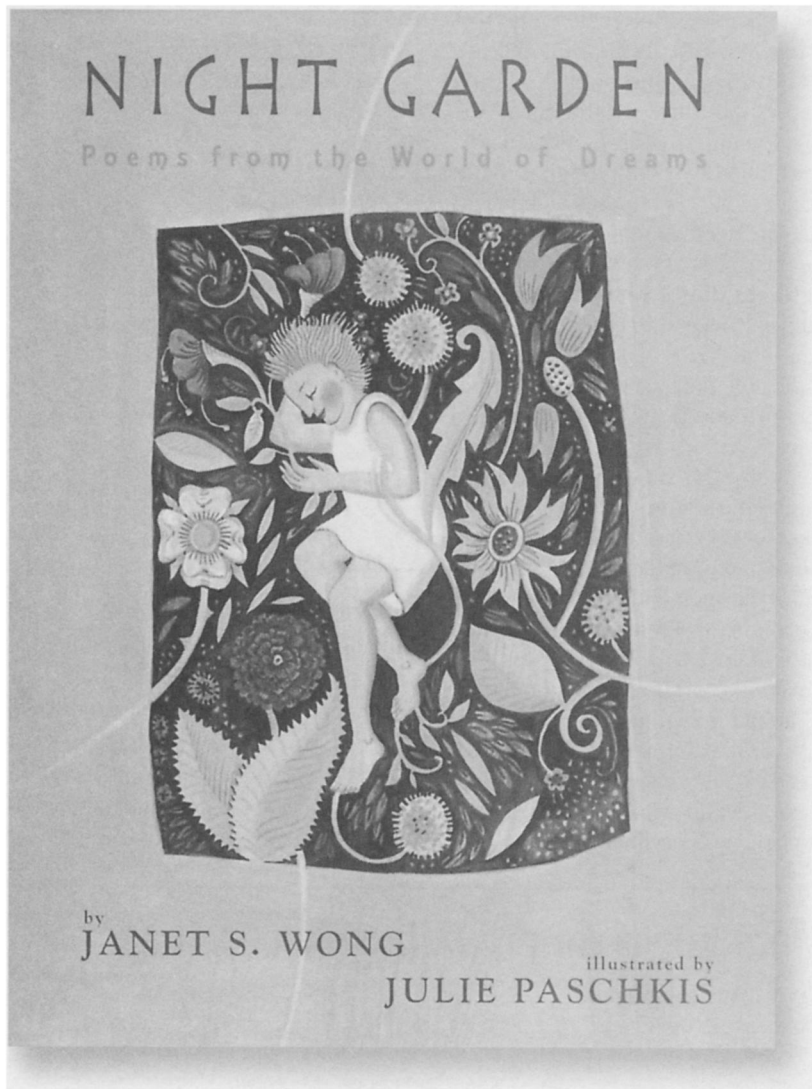
survive a drought. For several nights, Mishoo is encouraged by her mother's spirit to go to the cave of the She-Tiger. Once there, she begins to create images of galloping horses, a fighting rhinoceros, and a wounded bison. With each new drawing she adds more detail and develops her own artistic expression. Rocco

More books for promoting discussion

Henry Hikes to Fitchburg by D.B. Johnson is based on a passage from Henry Thoreau's *Walden*. Fitchburg is 30 miles away, and two friends hold a friendly competition to see who can arrive first. Henry chooses to walk, while his friend decides to earn money to take the train. The narrative gently reveals two different approaches to life and the beautifully detailed illustrations contrast the friends' experiences. Younger readers will enjoy learning about keeping a journal, while older ones will grapple with more complex issues of personal economy, perhaps seeking a copy of *Walden* and reading that "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it."

Twelve-year-old Meg Moore is motherless, living with her bookseller father in Restoration England in Katherine Sturtevant's novel *At the Sign of the Star*. As an heiress, Meg knows she can one day select her own suitor, and she plans to choose wisely to enable her to continue in the book trade and remain friends with authors and playwrights. When her father remarries, these plans change. As Meg adjusts to her new circumstances, she seeks wisdom from books, almanacs, and plays and finds maturity through her own ability as a writer. This novel will prompt interest in Restoration England, specifically related to the active roles played by females in London's literary scene.

Asking children "What do you think would make our world a more perfect place?" naturally generates response. *Lima Beans Would Be Illegal: Children's Ideas of a Perfect World*, Robert Bender's slim collection of responses from 100 children aged 7 to 12, reveals a range of perspectives about how the world should work. Accompanied by Bender's paintings on layers of acetate, the children's responses range from silly to sensitive to heart-breakingly serious. This book will surely inspire discussion about what a perfect world ought to include.



Jacket illustration ©2000 by Julie Paschkis from *Night Garden: Poems From the World of Dreams* by Janet S. Wong. Used by permission of the publisher, Margaret K. McElderry Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster.

Baviera's evocative illustrations were created using watercolors, raw earth pigments, charcoal, bear grease, animal fur, and plaster. After reading Lasky's poetic text and insightful author's note, readers will be encouraged to think about the first painters and to explore their own creative abilities.

Janet Wong's mode of expression is enchanting poetry. *Night Garden: Poems From the World of Dreams* takes readers from the depths of the earth with dreams waiting to bloom, to the heights of soaring birds flying free. It tells tales of fears in the night that are offset by dreams of "soft and fuzzy things." The 14 poems are illustrated by Julie Paschkis, who brings a mystical

quality to the verse with her surreal characters and monochromatic, repetitive motif found on each double-page spread. The dream poems illustrate the power of imagination—even when asleep.

In 1884, many 10-cent museums in New York City displayed human "curiosities." *Earthly Astonishments* by Marthe Jocelyn tells the story of 12-year-old Josephine who stands only 21 inches high. Sold by her parents to work as a servant in a boarding school, she flees an abusive headmistress and finds work in a museum show. The museum and the larger world of Coney Island are places where cruelty and kindness live side by side, reflecting the complexities

of human nature. The museum's curator is greedy but allows Josephine to negotiate the terms of her employment. She is befriended by the mother of "Albino Boy" who nurtures her son, another museum curiosity, while collecting tickets for the show. Josephine creatively expresses herself through her diminutive size and when her past collides with the present, she is forced to take charge, eventually designing her own life.

Sheila Greenwald's novel *Stuckville* finds fourth grader Emerald stuck living in a tiny apartment in New York City with her aspiring actor parents and no friends. Her parents claim this situation is temporary, but Emerald finds it too permanent and can hardly wait to live somewhere else. While waiting to leave, she meets two classmates who also live in the same building and reluctantly collaborates with them on a school project to define "My New York." Producing an "essay without words" Emerald duplicates her own apartment in miniature as she begins to notice other people who live in her building. In so doing, she takes on an unexpected role as "guardian angel" of the apartment complex by spying into neighbors' windows and reporting unusual activity. In time, Emerald discovers that being "stuck" in a large city can have its rewards.

Creative response

Creative response is revealed in literature using different methods or forms. Some books show characters who respond creatively to their circumstances. Others give readers an opportunity to respond creatively by performing. In addition, text and illustration may initiate readers' active participation.

Set in the Australian Outback, Elizabeth Honey's *Don't Pat the Wombat!* tells the humorous tale of a group of fifth and sixth graders away at school camp for one week. Included are the zany mishaps and pranks often associated with camp—mudfights, hidden candy, a giant pumpkin called "Meatloaf"—plus some new surprises that occur when an unpopular teacher shows up as a substitute chaperone. Written from the perspective of sixth grader Mark Ryder, the story is revealed through his camp journal, complete with doodles, drawings, and black-and-

white photographs. Illustrator William Clarke's wit and humor offers a fine accompaniment to Honey's story of how children respond to change in this 1997 Children's Book Council of Australia Honor Book, recently published in the U.S.

In *Pushing Up the Sky: Seven Native American Plays for Children*, Joseph Bruchac provides dramatized versions of traditional Native American tales. Introductions to each play and the tribe from which it originated precede expandable casts of characters and simple suggestions for costumes and props. The majority of these clever adaptations are explanations of how certain phenomena came to be, using animals and other elements of nature as characters. Teresa Flavin's radiant gouache paintings and detailed pen-and-ink drawings clarify individual traditions of the seven Native nations whose stories are depicted. Educators and students alike will realize that, although ample, the material

presented is only a starting point for creative participation in understanding the heritage of Native people.

Big Talk: Poems for Four Voices by Paul Fleischman is a frenzy of creativity written by the expert in multiple-part poetry. In picture-book format with bright computer-generated art from Beppe Giacobbe, these three poetic masterpieces will be most skillfully devoured by a quartet of older readers. Themes vary from country living in "The Quiet Evenings Here" to the lament of family members who have passed on in "Ghosts' Grace." Helpful hints on how to perform successfully on the first try are included. Adding dramatic voices to accommodate the mood of the poem is optional, but recommended.

Chris Raschka follows up his Caldecott Honor Book *Yo! Yes?* with the equally enticing *Ring! Yo?* Using watercolor, pastel, and cut paper illustrations of his characters, coupled with mostly one-word snippets of conversa-

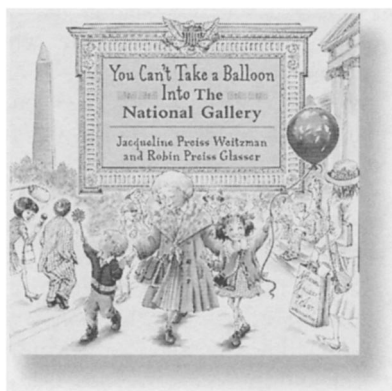
tion, Raschka shows the consequences of hearing only one side of a conversation: confusion! By interpreting facial expressions and punctuation, the reader may creatively attempt to infer what is communicated on the other end of the telephone line. It is not until the last pages that another possibility of the phone call's intent is revealed.

Readers may respond with a bit of toe-tapping and knee-slapping to *Frog Legs: A Picture Book of Active Verse* by George Shannon. This collection of 24 humorous poems is rhythmic and playful using alliteration and clever wordplay. "Tango through the treetops, or rumba with a roar./Share a drink of water, then dance a little more." (p. 14). Amit Trynan adds to the celebration with bright acrylics that show leaping, limber frogs with the ability to dance the jitterbug—not to mention the cancan. The action in the verse inspires in readers flop, tip, jump, and do the boogie buggaloo.



Jacket illustration ©2000 by Beppe Giacobbe from *Big Talk: Poems for Four Voices* by Paul Fleischman. Used by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press.

Literature strategy



Literature that exhibits a high level of creativity and promotes and supports creativity within its readers can be discovered in wordless books. These picture books tell a story entirely through illustration. The narrative is laid out in the same sequential manner as a book containing text, but it becomes the reader's responsibility to generate the story through verbal or written means.

You Can't Take a Balloon Into The National Gallery by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman and Robin Preiss Glasser is an excellent wordless book to share

with students. There are actually two stories that occur. First is a clever visit to a museum to view the many artistic treasures there, then a bright red balloon creates another type of adventure outside the museum walls. A young girl leaves the balloon in the care of a sidewalk photographer while she, her brother and grandmother go inside The National Gallery. The balloon gets loose, leading the photographer on a merry chase that encompasses many Washington, D.C. landmarks. The pen-and-ink backgrounds are enhanced by the watercolor figures in the foreground. All of this creates multiple stories from many different perspectives—those of the balloon, photographer, museum visitors, or onlookers. Students can also devise written dialogue for the characters on sticky notes, and place them like speech balloons next to the desired illustration.

Books that have limited text such as ***Ring! Yo?*** by Chris Raschka also invite readers to use their imagination and create stories because only one half of the phone conversation is included. Examples such as this may also serve as a model for readers to develop their own wordless books to share with others.

Another value of wordless picture books is that all readers, struggling or proficient, can feel successful. These books can also increase the abilities of second-language learners. The pictured story events provide for multiple interpretations as readers create their own meaning from the illustrations. Language development is stimulated as children take an active role in storytelling. "Reading" a wordless picture book is often an individual or small-group activity that encourages dialogue among children. This makes them excellent books for literature discussions. Illustrators such as David Weisner, Peter Spier, Pat Hutchins, Emily Arnold McCully, and Istvan Banyai have created wordless books that will provide numerous opportunities for creative storytelling.

*Jacket illustration ©2000 by Robin Preiss Glasser from ***You Can't Take a Balloon Into the National Gallery*** by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman. Used by permission of the publisher, Dial Books for Young Readers, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.*

Creative inquiry

Inquiry involves asking questions that may or may not generate an answer or solution. Sometimes within the inquiry process, new questions arise. Literature provides a basis for inquiry by presenting new ideas or perspectives that encourage readers to do their own research.

For educators who have wondered how to make dental hygiene exciting, Laurie Keller's ***Open Wide: Tooth School Inside*** is an irreverent, fact-packed introduction to tooth care. Mr. Flossman, a dentist/teacher who asks his class to "pledge allegiance to the mouth," teaches a classroom of 32 teeth. The book's factual content is punctuated with cartoonish sidebars and

humorous dialogue between student teeth that react with the same sarcasm, excitement, and interpersonal dynamics of students in a regular classroom. A visual feast, this book will be read repeatedly. In fact, children may desire to read this book alone or in a small group to appreciate the many details in the irresistible text and the zany mixed-media collages.

Madlenka, by Peter Sis, is a romp of inquiry through the neighborhood of a young girl. An aerial view of a city block enables readers to pinpoint Madlenka, who is off to spread the news about her loose tooth. Visits to Mr. Gaston the French baker, Mr. Singh the shop owner from India, and others reveal Madlenka's many aliases, as well as a wealth of cultural wisdom. Die-cut windows allow the reader to peek into the past lives of Madlenka's friends, while borders depict cultural artifacts that each has brought with them. Dark double-page spreads of tapestries transport readers to different lands. While it is doubtful that all children will live in a neighborhood as culturally rich as this one, ***Madlenka*** will encourage them to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Barbara Helen Berger's ***Angels on a Pin*** invites readers to ponder the age-old question, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" Curious musings, accompanied by dreamy illustrations, reveal a city no bigger than a speck of dust that was "the biggest, the best, the only city in the world" to the people who lived there. But when they get lonely, they discover that other cities exist, and set off on grand expeditions to see who might live there. In discovering they aren't alone, a grand boogie-woogie begins, more in images than in text. Berger's city scenes hold a dream-like quality, set against a lapis-colored, starry sky as she combines acrylic, colored pencil, and pastel on watercolor paper.

Douglas Florian's ***Mammalabilia*** is a curious child's delight. Through 21 short poems, accompanied by gouache paintings rendered on brown paper bags, Florian communicates facts about both familiar and lesser known mammals. The illustrations lend texture as well as a variety of hidden meanings that a child with an inquiring mind will seek out: for example, the hidden mes-

sage of “Grrrrr” in the tiger’s stripes or the “rhebok” that is pictured with tennis shoes on all four hooves. An additional curiosity is the visual representation of each animal in its poem: the Bactrian camel’s sentence is written in the shape of two humps, while doubling A’s is the trend in the words of the aardvark poem. Although the poems share the element of rhyme, each is unique, inspiring creative interpretation from the reader.

Author and illustrator James Rumford’s *Seeker of Knowledge: The Man Who Deciphered Egyptian Hieroglyphics* tells the story of Jean-François Champollion, who decided at age 11 to become the first person to read the ancient hieroglyphs of Egypt. Champollion’s quest for knowledge was supported by his brother and manifested through his intense self-education. This part-biography, part-saga of discovery is realistic, highlighting small triumphs and challenges along the way, many of which were the result of the political and social climate of the times. Dreamy watercolor paintings illustrate the work, while hieroglyphs interspersed throughout the text prove to be a point of investigation for the reader. Although the story begins in 1802, it depicts a role model with dreams and drive that modern readers will want to emulate.

Creating a vision

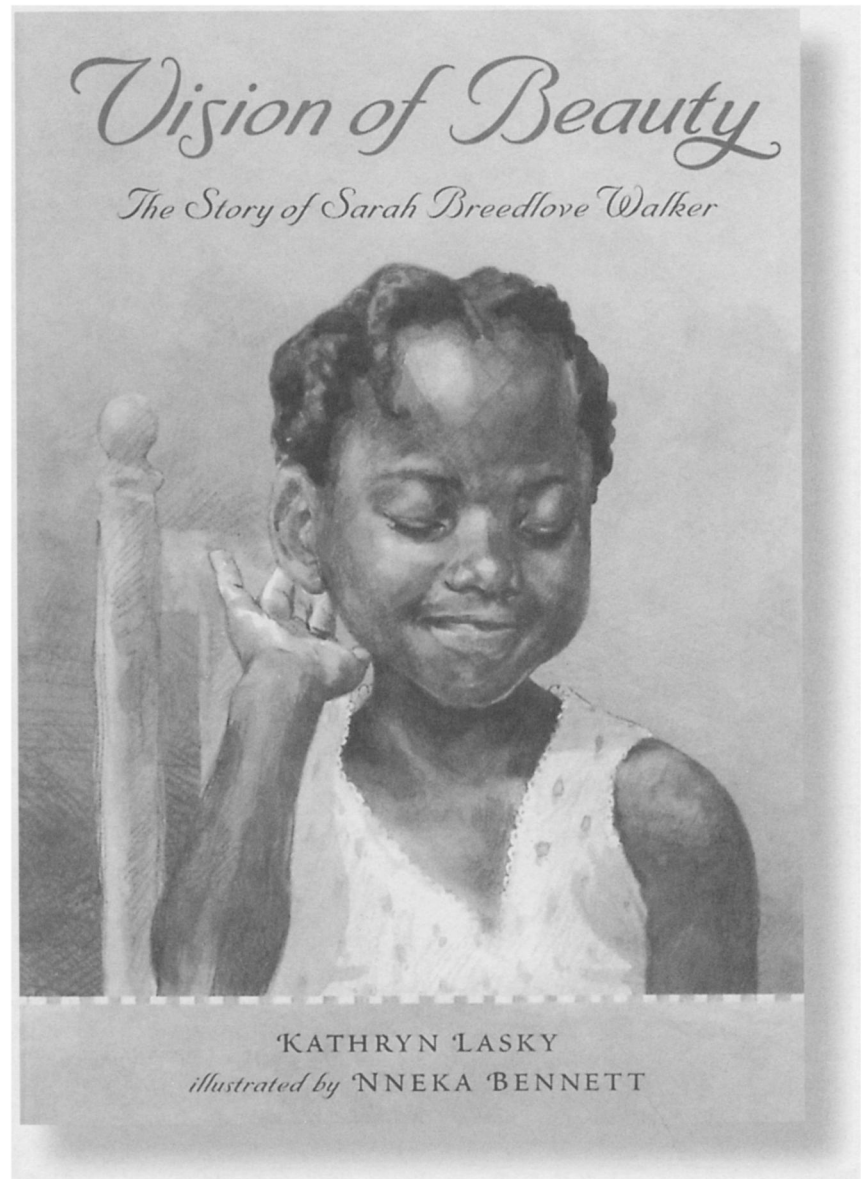
There are individuals, both real and imagined, who have a vision for other ways of thinking and doing. These people or characters are generally risk takers because in some way they must venture into the unknown, embracing changes that challenge them physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, or spiritually. In many ways, their vision helps them to survive circumstances.

A passion for adventure has often fueled an individual’s desire to take risks. Two photobiographies chronicle the efforts of George Mallory and Sir Edmund Hillary—men who aspired to climb Mount Everest. *Mystery on Everest: A Photobiography of George Mallory* by Audrey Salkeld discusses the life of the British mountain climber who attempted to become the first person to reach the top of Mount Everest

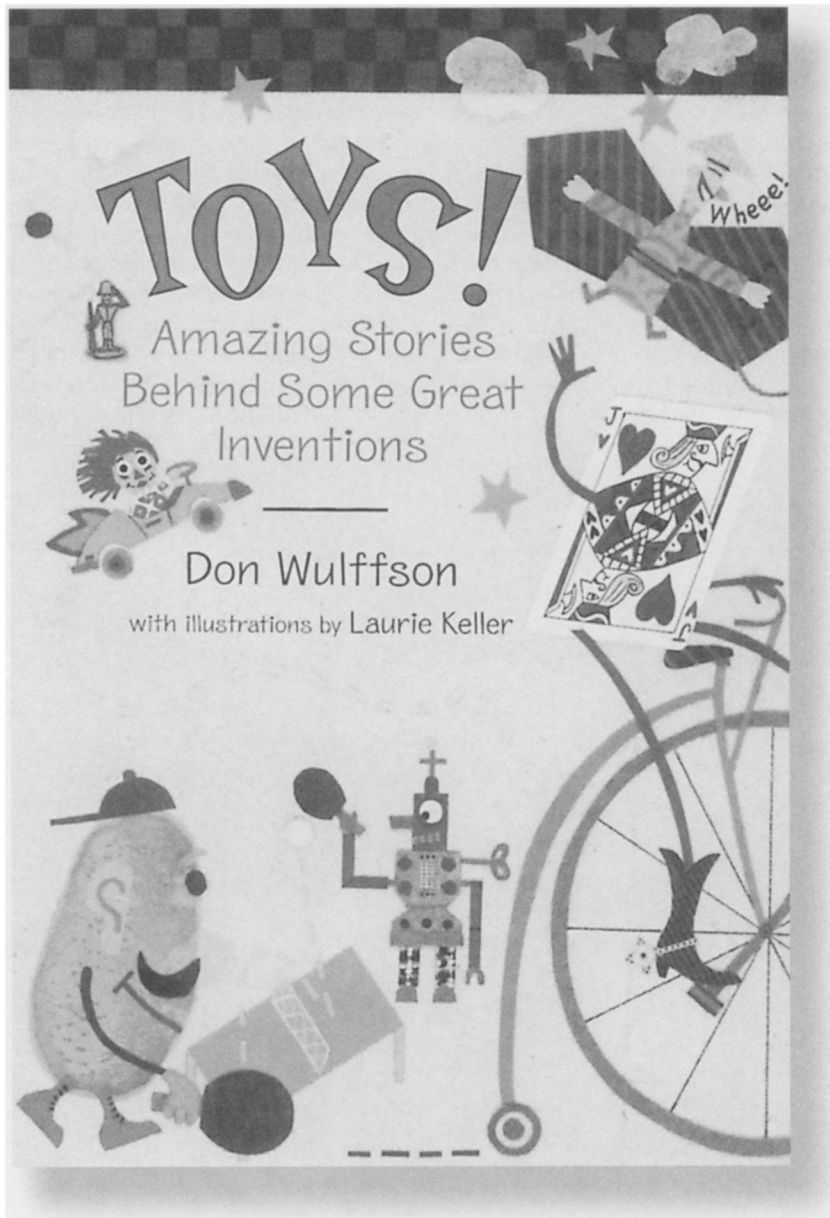
“because it’s there.” However, something went wrong that day in 1924, and it has never been determined if he did achieve his goal. In 1999, Mallory’s body was found close to, but not directly on, the summit. Even if he was unsuccessful, his inadequate equipment and a general lack of knowledge of how humans functioned at extreme altitudes made Mallory’s climb a historic one. The man credited with reaching the summit of Everest in 1953 is highlighted in *Triumph on Everest: A Photobiography of Sir Edmund Hillary* by

Broughton Coburn. Both biographies are well written and heavily documented with photographs that celebrate the human spirit and sense of adventure.

Sarah Breedlove Walker’s vision was to create hair and beauty products for black women after experiencing disastrous results from chemicals that damaged her hair and burned her scalp. In *Vision of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker*, Kathryn Lasky shares an amazing story of one of the most successful women entrepreneurs in the United States. The book chroni-



Jacket illustration ©2000 by Nneka Bennett from *Vision of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker* by Kathryn Lasky. Used by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press.



Jacket art ©2000 by Laurie Keller from *Toys! Amazing Stories Behind Some Great Inventions* by Don Wulffson. Used by permission of the publisher, Henry Holt and Company.

cles Walker's humble beginnings as the first free-born child of former slaves in Louisiana, follows her hard life as a laundress and single mother, and describes the beauty empire she created based on direct sales. This inspiring story is further enhanced by Nneka Bennett's pencil and watercolor illustrations that portray a woman filled with pride and respect for herself and others. Lasky also incorporates direct quotes from Walker into the text to bring to life a determined and innovative woman.

Catherine Thimmesch celebrates the ingenuity of girls and women from 3000 B.C. to the present in *Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women*. Anecdotal information profiles 12 remarkable women, introducing the inventors responsible for all sorts of indispensable items, including windshield wipers, Liquid Paper, flat-bottomed paper bags, and Toll House (chocolate chip) cookies. The book's introduction reminds readers: "Throughout history, women

have always been innovators. But their accomplishments have often been down-played, skimmed over, or ignored altogether...." (p. 6). Thimmesch's upbeat acknowledgement of these creative innovators seems determined to highlight what history has ignored. Melissa Sweet's small watercolor portraits of each inventor are complemented by full-page mixed media collages featuring each invention and adding to the book's spirited tone.

Toys! Amazing Stories Behind Some Great Inventions by Don Wulffson introduces traditional and historical toys from around the world. Each of the 25 entries is written as a narrative with a selection of factual highlights at the end. Some toys, like the kite, have a continuous history of over 3,000 years. Others, like pinball, have been banned, only to resurface in a new more responsive era. One entry states, "In 1987, Mr. Potato Head's pipe was taken away from him, and a big deal was made over 'his' decision to quit [smoking]. At a ceremony at the White House, his pipe was handed over to the surgeon general of the United States" (p. 27). The book includes a bibliography and a list of Web sites for more information on specific toys and toy manufacturers. Laurie Keller's humorous illustrations reinforce the odd circumstances that gave rise to these successful inventions.

Lois Lowry has again created a vision of a futuristic society in her novel *Gathering Blue*. Mysterious yet plausible, at times this society feels more primitive than futuristic. Its rules are based on savagery and deceit, and those who are weak or imperfect are either shunned or discarded. Kira, the novel's protagonist, faces an uncertain future in such a society. Recently orphaned and physically flawed, her fate will be determined by the Council of Guardians. Once she is spared from certain death, Kira must rely on her ability as an artist to provide the necessary vision and power to triumph and find hope. In so doing, she creates an important place for herself in the society and remains hopeful that her work will not only retell the past but also foretell a peaceful future.

Creative problem solving

When characters use wit and wisdom to solve problems they provide readers with new ways of thinking. Sometimes these characters are children, uncertain their actions will be supported or taken seriously. Other times they are adults who demonstrate how living a life filled with wonder, awe, and innovation leads to rich rewards. And other times, the characters are animals determined to make a difference and solve their own problems by remaining true to their abilities.

Susan Bonners's novel *Edwina Victorious* tells the story of a young girl who takes the lead from her 90-year-old great-grandaunt and ends up making a difference in her community. Edwina—Eddy to her family and friends—doesn't set out to become a community activist. But when she discovers a bundle of letters in her aunt's attic written to seek improvements in public places in town, Eddy cannot help but notice things such as the local playground in disrepair. So, she decides to do some letter-writing herself. Not certain she will be treated seriously, she uses her aunt's letters as a model, then forges her aunt's signature. When the mayor responds positively, Eddy continues writing letters, eventually revealing her true identity, both to the mayor and to her great-grandaunt.

Truly a man before his time, Benjamin Franklin was a thinker and a doer. James Cross Giblin's *The Amazing Life of Benjamin Franklin* uses engaging text to recount the life of this great politician and inventor. Readers learn of Benjamin Franklin's personal and political struggles along with his compassion for his country and his numerous inventions and accomplishments. Artist Michael Dooling's extensive research brings authenticity to the oil paintings that adorn each page and offer a vision of life in the American colonies in the 18th century. This comprehensive biography also includes a timeline of important dates from Franklin's life, a list of his major inventions, sayings from *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and a list of associated historic sites.

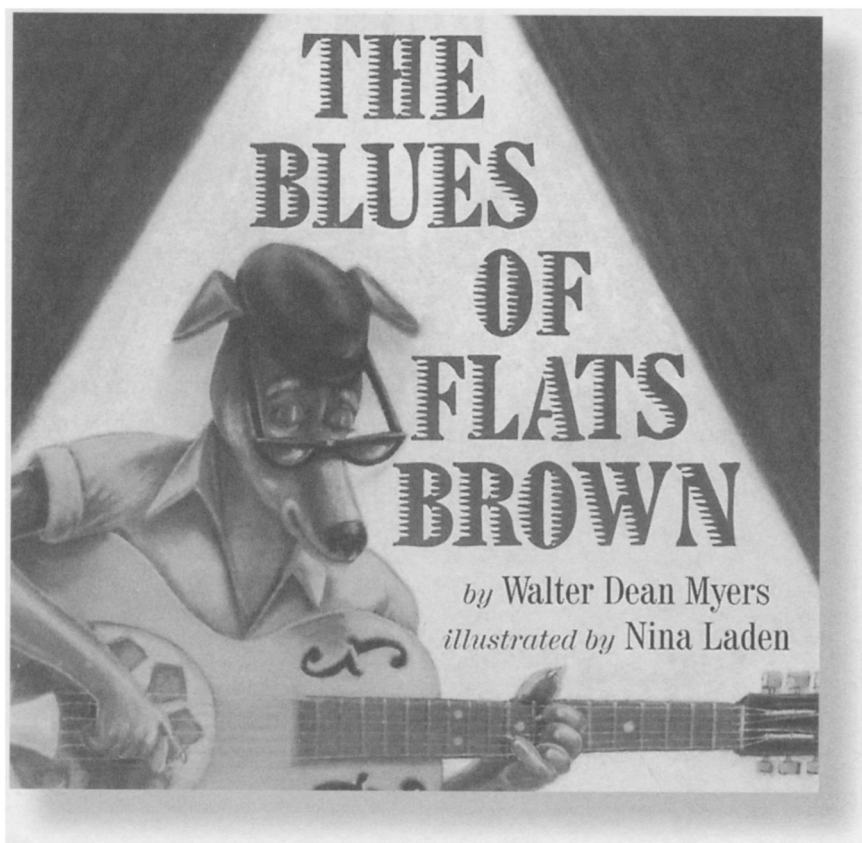
Hoping to discover how his sons will fare in the world, a rich merchant sends

both boys out with 10 coins each in *The Language of Birds*, Rafe Martin's retelling of a Russian folk tale. Vasilli squanders his money away, but lies about his profits. Ivan spends nothing, but rescues a baby bird and is granted a wish by its mother—to understand the language of birds. Reporting back, both father and brother mock Ivan. But when the king offers his daughter's hand to anyone who can stop the incessant cawing of the crows, Vasilli's attempts result in a death threat, while Ivan discovers the crows simply want a riddle solved. Susan Gaber's acrylic illustrations are framed with black borders featuring feathers or bird tracks, dramatically complementing this magical tale.

The animals in *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type* find a creative solution to obtaining electric blankets by going on strike and typing their demands. Doreen Cronin's hilarious story finds Farmer Brown greeted by typewritten messages on the barn door each morning. The cows refuse to give milk until

their ultimatum is met, and they convince the hens to join the strike by withholding their eggs. The poor, beleaguered farmer finally relents, but is met with a new demand from the masterful duck who has negotiated on behalf of the barn animals. Betsy Lewin's amusing watercolor illustrations add to the delightful story with cow hooves striking the typewriter keys and hens snuggled under plugged-in blankets.

"This here's the story of Flats Brown, the blues playingest dog you ever heard of." So begins *The Blues of Flats Brown*, Walter Dean Myers's soulful tale of a Mississippi junkyard dog owned by A.J. Grubbs, a man so mean that he did not even like himself. When Flats and his friend Caleb discover that Grubbs intends to turn them into fighting dogs, they strike out for Memphis, Tennessee. Flats records a song that makes him well known across the country, which puts Grubbs hot on his trail. But there is nothing like the blues to turn even the coldest hearts warm again, and



Jacket illustration by Nina Laden from *The Blues of Flats Brown* by Walter Dean Myers. Used by permission of the publisher, Holiday House.

“The Gritty Grubbs Blues” works its magic on A.J. The rhythmic, rolling text is complemented by Nina Laden’s striking pastels, adding to the atmosphere.

This month’s column has provided examples of creativity—both fact and fiction. Thimmesch’s introduction to *Girls Think of Everything* credits inventiveness and ingenuity for having an impact on everyday lives. “[M]any inventions evolve out of general curiosity—a sense of interest, a sense of ‘wouldn’t it be fun if?’” (p. 5). Creativity is sparked by books that readers encounter, and it’s creative authors and illustrators who work furthers such imaginative response.

The contributing reviewers are as follows: Julie Carlton, First Presbyterian Preschool, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA; Jennifer L. Fabbi, Curriculum Materials Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, USA; Janine A. King, Brighton School, Lynnwood, Washington, USA; Sylvia Tag, Wilson Library, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington, USA.

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