

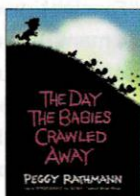
Children

AGES 0-8

The Day the Babies Crawled Away

By Peggy Rathmann

"We moms and dads were eating pies, / The babies saw some butterflies - / And what do you know? / Surprise! Surprise! / The babies crawled away!"



And with each step (knee-plant?) in Caldecott Medal-winner Rathmann's latest, babies come closer to the edge of a cliff, a cave of bats, or a beehive. Since a pie-eating contest has otherwise distracted the adults, it is up to our toddler-age hero, dressed in a firefighter's cap, to retrieve the little ones. The versatile Rathmann has changed the look of her work again, laying black silhouette figures over airbrushed paper. Most critics loved the style, while *Booklist* found it flat.

"The book itself is a pleasure, despite the hype. Rathmann does not let us down by resting on her artistic laurels and repeating herself." KARLA KUSKIN, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, 11/16/03.

"[Rathmann] could win [the Caldecott] again with this sweet, funny, original and stunningly beautiful picture book. . . . What makes the book special is the illustrations of the babies' adventures, all done in diamond-sharp black silhouette against a sky that deepens from cloudy blue through saffron-green, orange and pink to luminous violet, as night falls, and babies and heroic rescuer alike snuggle up with their moms."

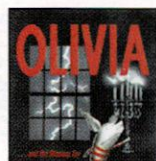
ELIZABETH WARD, WASHINGTON POST, 10/12/03.

"These illustrations, reminiscent of the art in Jan Pienkowski's books about Christmas and Easter, may be difficult for little children to absorb. Not only must kids read details into the flat, black silhouettes, but they will also find that some objects are so small they are hard to discern." ILENE COOPER, BOOKLIST, 9/15/03.

Olivia . . . and the Missing Toy

By Ian Falconer

Olivia, tantrum expert, first blames her brother for the disappearance of her favorite toy. The culprit turns out to be the family dog, who has chewed the toy to bits. All ends happily, as even larger-than-life Olivia can forgive. Although *The Times*' review wasn't as negative overall as the portion we quote below indicates, we just had to include it. Has the Olivia backlash begun? Falconer's third *Olivia* book is in the same style and wit as his previous books, and existing fans should not be disappointed.



"Olivia is one of those kids' books, filled as it is with references to Callas and Jackson Pollock and the ballet, that hip mommies and daddies like to give to the children of other hip mommies and daddies in order to demonstrate, yet again, what delightfully hip mommies and daddies we all are. . . . While the parents were busily flattering their own good taste, the children, in my experience, thought *Olivia* was just sort of O.K." DWIGHT GARNER, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, 11/16/03.

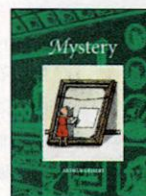
"The plot is slight . . . but *New Yorker* cartoonist Ian Falconer's spare charcoal drawings, splashed with Olivia's favorite fire-engine red, are as dryly amusing as ever." ELIZABETH WARD, WASHINGTON POST, 10/12/03.

For a porcino-centric book with slightly less hype (and for slightly older readers), consider:

Mystery

By Arthur Geisert

A piglet and her grandfather visit the art gallery on "copying day," when artists may copy the works displayed. But portions of the paintings (all modeled after classics, but featuring pigs) have been cut out. Can our young protagonist solve the mystery of the cut-up paintings? Illustrated in great, etched detail by Geisert.



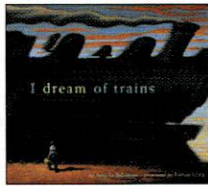
". . . the piglet crime scene investigator is stylish and oh, so smart. Fun." MARY HARRIS RUSSELL, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, 11/16/03.
". . . a beguiling whodunit in which a typically astute Geisert piglet deduces who is cutting out and stealing neat sections of the paintings in the local museum . . ." ELIZABETH WARD, WASHINGTON POST, 09/28/03.

I Dream of Trains

By Angela Johnson, illustrated by Loren Long

Johnson, recipient of a recent MacArthur "genius award," writes of an African-American boy working in Mississippi's cotton fields at the beginning of the twentieth century. As he listens to the trains pass, he dreams of the legendary

Casey Jones with his black engineer at the helm and thinks: "When my time comes for leaving, I will take a train."



"... gorgeous ..." TONY HISS, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, 11/16/03.

"The story is about the power of a dream, for anyone struggling with smallness and oppression." MARY HARRIS RUSSELL, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, 10/19/03.

"... a work worthy of any contemporary collection." SUZANNE RUST, BLACK ISSUES BOOK REVIEW, JULY/AUG 2003.

Intermediate

AGES 9-12

The Tree of Life Charles Darwin

By Peter Sis

✦ A Best Illustrated Book of 2003 - New York Times Book Review Another MacArthur "genius award" winner (see *I Dream of Trains* above), Sis masterfully presents visual information along with a younger reader's story of science. His 1996 biography of



Galileo, *Starry Messenger*, is a wonderful example. Here, Sis recounts the story of Darwin's youth, voyage on the H.M.S. Beagle, and development of the theory of evolution. Critics can't decide about the amount of information presented—*The Washington Post* worries about overload while *The Times* wished for a wider perspective that included more on why evolution seemed so blasphemous at the time. Concerns aside, for curious readers, *Tree of Life* is an amazing book.

"Fascinating material - but the choppy, many-layered presentation might baffle or bore many kids." ELIZABETH WARD, WASHINGTON POST, 10/12/03.

"... [a] stunning picture book biography. ... Sweeping in scope, lavish in detail, this is a book to launch many a reader's personal voyage of discovery."

DIANE ROBACK, PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, 10/13/03.

"... succeeds brilliantly in arresting and educating the eye." DARIA DONNELLY, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, 11/16/03.

A MEETING OF GREAT MINDS

Brundibar

After the opera by Hans Krasa and Adolf Hoffmeister. Retold by Tony Kushner, illustrated by Maurice Sendak.

✦ A Best Illustrated Book of 2003 - New York Times Book Review

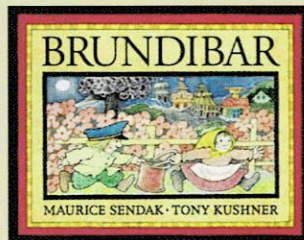
Caldecott Medal-winner Maurice Sendak and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner adapt a 1938 children's opera that was performed at the Terezin concentration camp.

Brundibar is an allegorical tale of the rise of Hitler in Europe. Two children sing on a street corner to earn money for milk for their sick mother while Brundibar the organ grinder drowns out their song with his own ("Little children, how I hate 'em / How I wish the bedbugs ate 'em"). They come back the next day with 300 children, who sing a lullaby that enchants the village and ensures their protection from Brundibar. The story ends on a dark note, with Brundibar promising he'll return.

Kushner told *Newsday* that he was hesitant about adapting this darker children's tale, but feels that he and Sendak found the right compromise: "The book doesn't cheapen the Holocaust, nor does it traumatize young readers," Kushner says. "It does what, to me now in hindsight, a book on the Holocaust for children should do, which is to sort of gently embed in the minds and spirits of children some of the images of the world, so that the way is prepared for the knowledge that will come later, when you are 10 and 11 and 12, and ready to take it on."

"The story, though grim indeed, should become essential reading. ... Is it ever too early to learn to recognize oppression for what it is?" GREGORY MAGUIRE, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, 11/16/03.

"Despite a final threat from Brundibar, the story is ultimately one of hope, as the children and their allies band together to defeat the evil foe. The collaborators wisely allow readers to appreciate the story on one level, yet those familiar with the opera's origins (a note in the flap copy tells of Krasa's death at Auschwitz) will find a haunting subtext here." PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, 11/3/03.

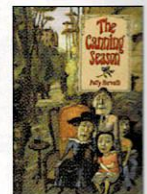


The Canning Season

By Polly Horvath

✦ 2003 National Book Award Winner

The author of *Everything on a Waffle* and *The Trolls* (both discussed in our May/June 2003 issue) returns with another wonderful tale of children and their eccentric relatives. When 13-year-old Ratchet's mother ships her off to her twin great aunts' home in rural Maine, she learns her odd family history and some important life lessons. Just as Maine blueberries mature for canning season, so, too, does Ratchet blossom by summer's end. "Horvath's subject matter - and the flip manner and blunt prose she uses to describe it - straddle a line between refreshing and perhaps a bit too precocious for young readers. But as the story picks up speed, after dragging at first, it paints an endearing picture of



the peculiar relationship[s] . . ." TERESA MENDEZ, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, 10/28/03. "Horvath likes setting her young protagonists free from conventional authorities – parents, schools and such-like – and planting them in situations where, under the more benign influence of eccentric relatives, they must figure out for themselves how best to grow."

ELIZABETH WARD, WASHINGTON POST, 7/27/03.

" . . . children who depend on clear linear plotting may find this book frustrating, as it is more accumulation than narrative, but those sophisticated enough to enjoy a less conventional story are in for a tasty treat with a sharp bite."

SUSAN DOVE LEMPKE, HORN BOOK MAGAZINE, MAY-JUNE 2003.

"Many complicating factors arise in this dark but surprisingly sweet novel, full of wicked satire and profound life lessons. Warning: very R-rated language."

SUSAN FAUST, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, 11/16/03.

Breakout

By Paul Fleischman

♦ 2003 National Book Award Finalist

The allure of *Breakout* is not only the quality of the writing, but also its structure. Del, a 17-year-old leaving her latest foster home, is stuck in a day-long traffic jam. She passes her time by imagining the lives of the people around her, searching for a bathroom, and even participating in a talent show. A series of interspersed monologues that the 25-year-old Del (now Elena Franco) performs as artist and playwright offers a unique perspective on her story, her art, and the seemingly directionless life of a teenager.

"Fleishman's polished writing zips right through the pages and will engage young readers. ('You can feel a thousand plans melting like snowflakes in a thousand palms. . . . We might as well be plants!') *Breakout* is a 124-page joy ride."

STEPHANIE BROADHURST, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, 10/28/03.



"Del is a believable teen, poised on the edge of something new but not quite yet sure where her talents will take her. Fleischman's artful structure, distinctive voices, and carefully chosen details make this a splendid choice for teens on the verge of a breakout of their own."

KATHLEEN ISAACS, SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, 9/03. "The byplay of monologues and real-time incidents is intriguing, but the whole is even more than the sum of its entertaining parts."

MARY HARRIS RUSSELL, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, 11/2/03.

Young Adult AGES 13 AND UP

The River Between Us

By Richard Peck

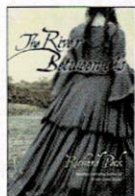
♦ 2003 National Book Award Finalist

Two mysterious young women, the fair-skinned Delphine and her darker sister, Calinda, travel up the Mississippi River during the Civil War to board at the Pruitt home in Southern Illinois. When 15-year-old Tilly Pruitt's older brother leaves to fight with Union troops, Tilly and Delphine set off to bring him home. As the girls witness the horrors of war, Tilly's brother falls in love, and later generations discover their real racial heritage.

"This unusual Civil War novel really boosts Peck's credentials as America's best living author for young adults. Not only is it a gripping yarn . . . but it is nearly as intricately structured as *Wuthering Heights*, with multiple narrators and tales-within-tales enhancing both the mystery and the wistfulness of long-ago events."

ELIZABETH WARD, WASHINGTON POST, 09/28/03.

"Enveloped by the Mississippi River, this story is a gem for young readers. . . . Not just a history lesson, the story addresses the subtler racial complexi-



ties of this brutal war while keeping character relationships alive. Note: graphic portrayal of war injuries."

TONYA MILLER, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, 10/28/03.

"Here, Richard Peck has stretched far beyond his Newbery winner *A Year Down Yonder*, using the Mississippi River as a boundary and a liberation, a way to place great characters in tense situations where guts count and courage comes in the form of bandages and compassion. A fine read and an intriguing and rare insight into a little-known aspect of the Civil War."

LEIGH FENLY, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE, 10/5/03.

The Amulet of Samarkand The Bartimaeus Trilogy, Book One

By Jonathan Stroud

In the 21st century, magicians run the government. Our hero Nathaniel is sold to the state by his parents and becomes a magician-in-training. When he is publicly humiliated by an evil magician, Nathaniel swears revenge. Soon he summons a powerful, and amoral, 5,000-year-old djinni, Bartimaeus, and chaos ensues. It's not that Bartimaeus is bad—he's witty and entertaining—but he doesn't let morality or human life get in the way of his master's assignments. Miramax recently offered several million dollars for the publishing and film rights to Stroud's work.

"One of this year's most inventive and ingenious novels. . . ." NICOLETTE JONES, SUNDAY TIMES (LONDON), 10/19/03.

"Yes, this is young-adult fiction, but like the latest episode of the kid wizard with the lightning scar on his forehead, its darker vision and compelling story will appeal to pre-teens and adults alike."

ERIC S. ELKINS, DENVER POST, 10/26/03.

"Do we really need another book about magic? Well, in this case we do. This is a hilarious read with a stropky young wizard whose daemon, Bartimaeus, is funny, cynical, and totally out for himself."

OBSERVER (LONDON), 10/19/03. ■

