



# TEACHERS' CHOICES for 2008

A project of the  
International Reading Association  
Logo illustration © by Chris Van Allsburg

The Teachers' Choices logo that Chris Van Allsburg created (see above) illuminates the idea that good books reach out and tap us on the shoulder to get our attention.

Each year since 1989 the International Reading Association's Teachers' Choices project has identified outstanding trade books published for children and adolescents that teachers find to be exceptional in curriculum use. Parents, also, will find books from the Teachers' Choices list good for reading aloud at home and for background information on questions that arise from tours to a farm, aquarium, or museum and from other shared family events such as television viewing.

The selection is accomplished through a field test in the United States of over 300 newly published books submitted by North American trade book publishers. Seven teams, made up of a regional coordinator, field leaders, teacher reviewers, and trainees for the project, try out the books in classrooms and libraries to select those that meet the established criteria. Regional coordinators circulate copies of the books

among teachers and librarians who use them with students. The coordinators record educators' reactions to each book and tabulate their final ratings. Each book is read by a minimum of six teachers or librarians in each region, although some books have been read by as many as 200 people in a single region.

Ratings from the seven regions are collated to produce the national list. Books are grouped into Primary (K-2, ages 5-8), Intermediate (grades 3-5, ages 8-11), and Advanced (grades 6-8, ages 11-14) levels. The bulleted examples illustrate selection criteria.

- Books that reflect high literary quality in style, content, structure, beauty of language, and presentation
- Books that might not be discovered or fully appreciated by children without introduction by a knowledgeable educator or other adult
- Books that have potential for use across the curriculum

Teachers incorporate such strategies as reading aloud, displays, group projects, and art/music/drama productions. All curriculum areas are covered in the selections.

Regional coordinators for the 2007–2008 field test were Jeanie H. Burnett, Kutztown, Pennsylvania (trainee, Susan T. White, Wilmington, Delaware); Nancy Allee, Collierville, Tennessee (trainee, Cathy L. Denman, Titusville, Florida); Linda J. Graves, Ottawa, Ohio; Patrice Kraus, West Des Moines, Iowa; Marci Mitchell, Mission, Texas; Tammy Langeberg, Boulder, Colorado (trainee, Jessica Hollon, Douglas, Wyoming); and Tonya Freeman, Eagle River, Alaska. Joyce Hamon, Evansville, Indiana, and Suzanne Jensen, Leawood, Kansas, coordinated the project.

Annotations contain bibliographic data, number of pages, and price. Publishers furnished price information as of late spring 2008; prices are subject to change without notice. The letters **CU** indicate suggestions for Curriculum Use. Regional coordinators and trainees who wrote the annotations are identified by their initials following the review.

## Primary

### **Ain't Nobody a Stranger to Me**

Ann Grifalconi. Ill. Jerry Pinkney.

*The Underground Railroad comes to life in this picture book through a grandfather's recounting of his lesson in friendship to his granddaughter. Based loosely on the life of Orleans Finger, a former slave, who lived by the words, "Ain't nobody a stranger to me," the text and illustrations combine to create a picture of past and present in a grandfather's life. **CU:** Beautifully illustrated. This is an excellent read-aloud to grades K and up, especially during grandparents or Black History celebrations. **NA***

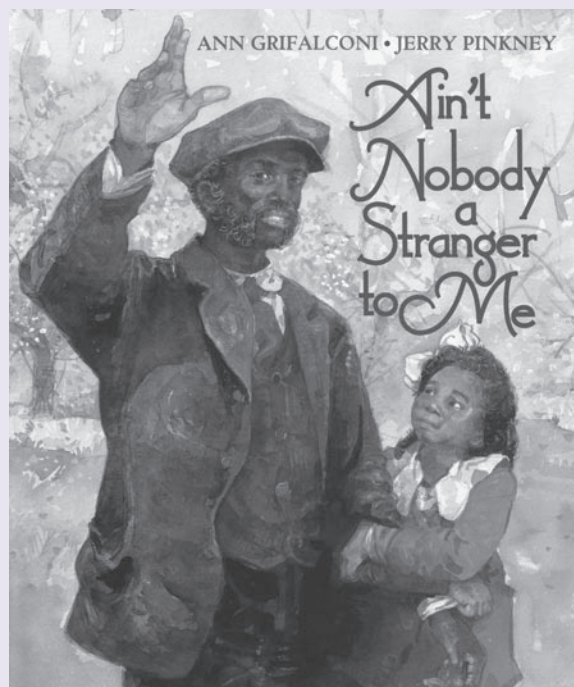
Hyperion. 32 pp. US\$16.99.

### **D Is for Drinking Gourd: An African American Alphabet**

Nancy I. Sanders. Ill. E.B. Lewis.

*Iconic watercolor paintings that portray African American impressions are displayed in alphabetical order and enhanced with carefully crafted, emphatic poetry. This exquisitely complex picture book invites readers' understanding and appreciation on many levels of thinking. The parallel informational text provides important facts to support memory of important historic events in the African American, nation-building experience. **CU:** American history social studies units; poetry; art and music. **JHB***

Sleeping Bear. 36 pp. US\$17.95.



From *Ain't Nobody a Stranger to Me* by Ann Grifalconi. Text copyright 2007 by Ann Grifalconi. Illustrations copyright 2007 by Jerry Pinkney. Reprinted by permission of Hyperion Books for Children. All rights reserved.

### **Guess What Is Growing Inside This Egg**

Mia Posada.

*The author leads the reader in a guessing game of six different animals' eggs, using subtle hints in fun verses and bright illustrations done with collage. Once the animal is revealed, there are interesting facts about the animal and its eggs. The final pages reveal the eggs in actual size and more facts for a curious child or adult.*

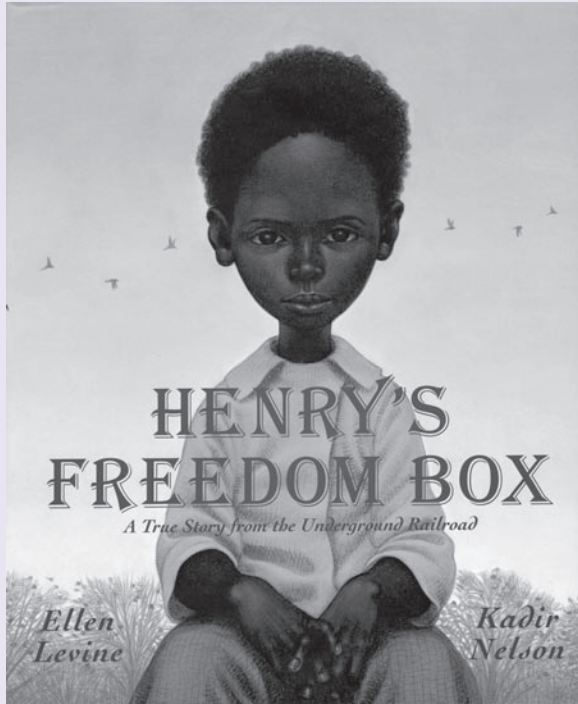
**CU:** Science unit on life cycles in nature. Connect with art and have children imagine and draw what their egg would look like if they were hatched from an egg. **CLD**

Millbrook. 32 pp. US\$15.95.

### **Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story From the Underground Railroad**

Ellen Levine. Ill. Kadir Nelson.

*Stunning illustrations tell the historical account of Henry, a runaway slave who mailed himself 350 miles in a box to freedom from Richmond, VA, to Philadelphia, PA. Simple text delivers a heartbreaking and inspiring story of Henry Brown, a real-life hero who never knew his age or birthday, and his escape from slavery. **CU:** All grade levels will benefit from this introduction to the era*



From *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine. Illustrations by Kadir Nelson. Used by permission of Scholastic Press.

leading up to the Civil War and the ingenious use of the famous Underground Railroad. **TF**

Scholastic. 40 pp. US\$16.99.

### How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?

Margaret McNamara. Ill. G. Brian Karas.

*Math concepts come alive for Mr. Tiffin's class. Charlie is the smallest child in this class, and it bothers him. The class uses pumpkins to categorize and seeds to count. Bowls filled with pumpkin seeds demonstrate the concepts of full and empty. Mr. Tiffin's class even shows how to use estimation and even-odd numbers. Charlie learns that the biggest is not always best and that small pumpkins can have many seeds. **CU:** This book is wonderful for hands-on math ideas and boosting self-concept. **LJG***

Schwartz & Wade. 40 pp. US\$14.99.

### Library Mouse

Daniel Kirk.

*When a mouse who lives in a school library decides to write books of his own, the children that discover the books are fascinated. They want to meet this author, but the mouse has a different plan. He inspires the students*

*to be authors themselves and to write their own stories.*

**CU:** Young children beginning a writer's workshop would be motivated to write and illustrate stories by listening to this book. It could also be used to introduce or review the different sections of a library and genres of books. **JH**

Abrams Books for Young Readers. 32 pp. US\$15.95.

### The Orange Shoes

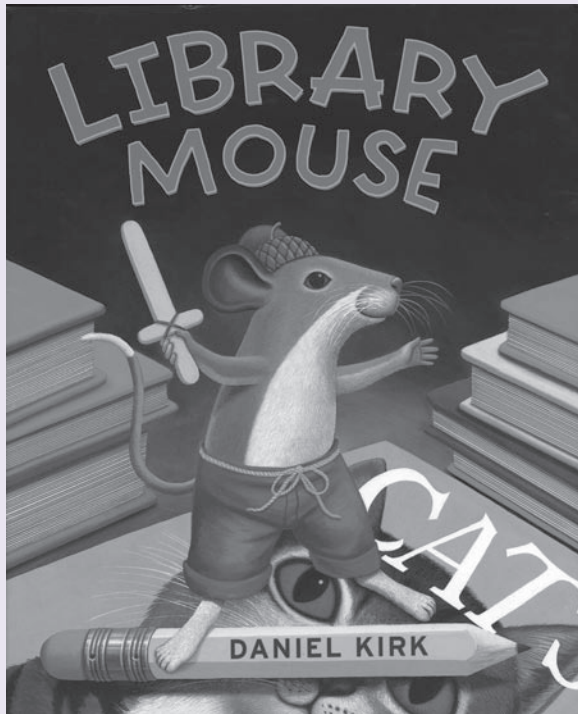
Trinka Hakes Noble. Ill. Doris Ettlinger.

*Delly, a young rural girl from a poor but loving family, discovers the true riches in life are found in family and making the best of difficult times. Her love of art and nature paired with her creative problem-solving skills make Delly an inspiring character who finds positive ways to fuel her spirit. The illustrations invite the reader into the story and enhance the storytelling. **CU:** This heartwarming story provides discussion opportunities related to poverty (what makes a person rich?), bullying, and self-reliance. **PK***

Sleeping Bear. 38 pp. US\$16.95.



*How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?* by Margaret McNamara; illustrated by G. Brian Karas, published by Schwartz & Wade Books, an imprint of Random House Children's Books.



*Library Mouse* by Daniel Kirk (Abrams).

### Over in the Jungle: A Rainforest Rhyme

Marianne Berkes. Ill. Jeanette Canyon.

*Using the well-known rhyme "Over in the Meadow," this book creates a world of rainforest animals and their young. The polymer clay illustrations give a realistic view of the tropical rainforest. The book includes added information about each rainforest animal from the story and includes the tune/song. CU: The rich language can be used with craft writing. The author and illustrator provide pages with tips about extended activities that include actions for each animal, discussion about the layers of the rainforest, and counting lessons. TL*

Dawn Publications. 32 pp. US\$8.95.

### The Rainforest Grew All Around

Susan K. Mitchell. Ill. Connie McLennan.

*Join the rainforest chorus in this creative adaptation of the familiar song "The Green Grass Grew All Around." The tune is contagious, and everyone will learn more about frogs, ants, birds, boas, kapok trees, and bromeliads inhabiting the rainforest. Treasure troves of games and recipes for cookies await the young researcher. CU: Beautiful neon-colored artwork invites readers to open this multiuse book for a musical connection into the sci-*

*ence of the Amazon ecosystem to teach children about the interdependence of nature. MM*

Sylvan Dell. 32 pp. US\$15.95.

### A Seed Is Sleepy

Dianna Hutts Aston. Ill. Sylvia Long.

*A seed is many things! Brief statements about seeds are followed by snippets of factual information and intriguing bits of seed-related trivia. Exquisite, detailed drawings of a wide variety of seeds accompany the multilevel text. CU: This book will enhance any study of plant life cycles. STW*

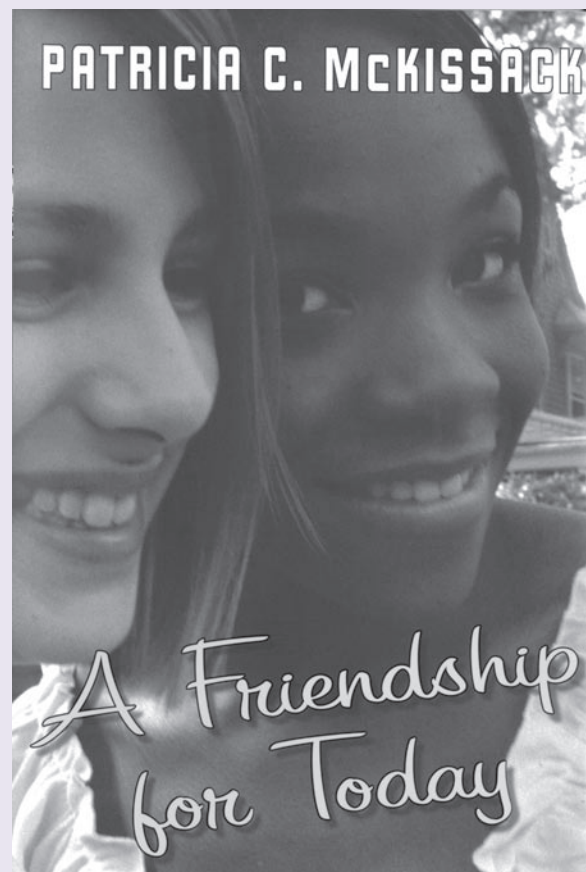
Chronicle. 40 pp. US\$16.99.

## Intermediate

### A Friendship for Today

Patricia C. McKissack.

*Rosemary is one of the first African Americans to enroll in an all-white school. Throughout the year she*



From *A Friendship for Today* by Patricia C. McKissack. Used by permission of Scholastic Press.

develops an uneasy friendship with her neighborhood nemesis, Grace “the tasteless” Hamilton, and with the help of supportive adults and a rescued, injured kitten, learns the value of tolerance and perseverance. This book is based on the author’s own experience in 1954 Missouri. **CU:** This historical novel supports middle school Civil Rights movement and school integration curriculum and speaks to students in all schools where there is intolerance, whether for ethnic, economic, or social reasons. **NA**

Scholastic. 240 pp. US\$16.99.

### The Invention of Hugo Cabret

Brian Selznick.

This book itself is an invention because it is a synthesis of picture book, graphic novel, and film. Through displays of intricate gray-toned pencil drawings as well as craftily placed words, readers can follow the complex story of an orphan boy who maintains the clocks in a Parisian train station but who thrills to the quest for the mystery of a mechanical man. Solid black pages support the mystery that unfolds, while drawings move the plot along. Credits are noteworthy. **CU:** literacy; fine arts and drama. **JHB**

Scholastic. 544 pp. US\$22.99.

### The Mutiny on the Bounty

Patrick O’Brien.

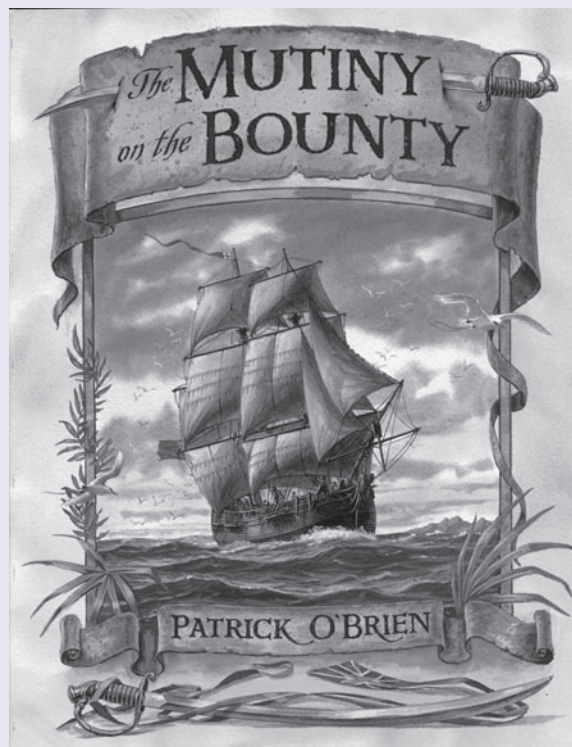
This timeless story is brought to life for younger readers through vivid watercolor and gouache paintings and accessible text. Interesting historical facts and details about life on the high seas supplement the adventure. This retelling and its dramatic illustrations invite young readers into the world of classic literature. **CU:** An excellent addition to units on explorers, trade, and human rights. Students could also compare and contrast life as a sailor then and now. **CLD**

Walker Books for Young Readers. 40 pp. US\$17.95.

### One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II

Lita Judge. Ill. by the author.

This story was inspired by the author’s discovery of thousands of tracings of feet in her grandparents’ attic. What began as her grandparents’ effort to help one family grew into a grassroots relief campaign to provide shoes for children and adults in war-torn Europe following WWII. Emotion-filled watercolor illustrations are interspersed with photographs, tracings, and other artifacts that help tell the story. This is a poignant reminder that ordinary people can make an extraordinary



From *The Mutiny on the Bounty* by Patrick O’Brien. Copyright 2007 Walker Books for Young Readers.

difference. **CU:** World War II; journals; diversity; and overcoming adversity. **LJG**

Hyperion. 40 pp. US\$15.99.

### A Song for Harlem: Scraps of Time, 1928

Patricia C. McKissack. Ill. Gordon C. James.

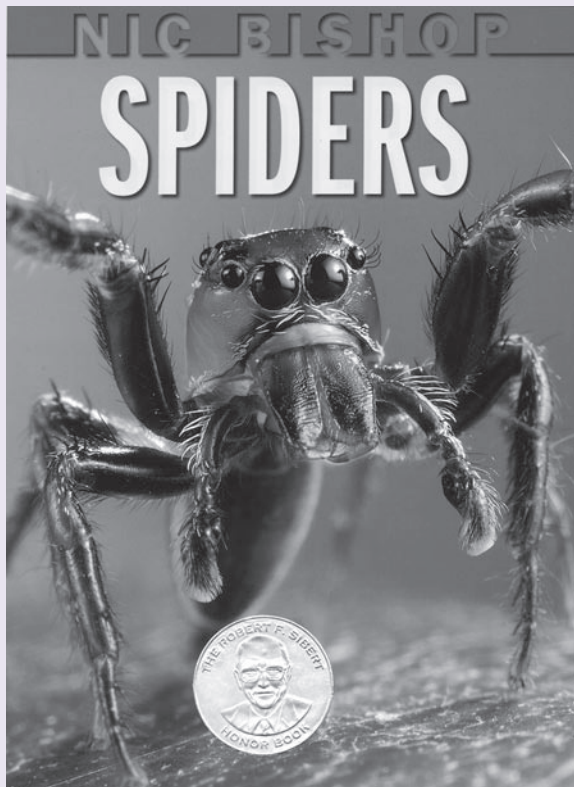
After being accepted into a summer writing program, Lilly Belle, a young girl from a small town in Tennessee, travels to Harlem to be instructed by the writer Zora Neale Hurston during the summer of 1928. Through the summer writing program she learns not only about writing, but also about friendships and her own character as well as the character of others. **CU:** This book could be used for teaching about the Harlem Renaissance and where ideas and voice come from when writing. **JH**

Viking Juvenile. 112 pp. US\$14.99.

### Spiders

Nic Bishop.

With fabulous up-close photos and large colored bold-face print for effect, this book by Nic Bishop is sure to be a hit with readers of all ages. Captivating facts paired with ingenious delivery of text will make this a



From *Spiders* by Nic Bishop. Used by permission of Scholastic Nonfiction.

*must-have for any bookshelf. Bishop uses his expertise as a biologist and nature photographer to create a fascinating research book for blooming scientists. CU: A bonus with this nonfiction research book about spiders is an easy-to-use glossary and index for beginning nature scientists. TF*

Scholastic Nonfiction. 48 pp. US\$17.99.

### Sweet Land of Liberty

Deborah Hopkinson. Ill. Leonard Jenkins.

*As a child, Oscar Chapman watched his black friends suffer racial injustices. As an adult and assistant secretary of interior under President Franklin Roosevelt, Chapman again witnessed racial injustice. When African American opera singer Marian Anderson was denied the use of Constitution Hall, Chapman organized the 1939 Anderson concert given at the Lincoln Memorial for 75,000 people. CU: Mixed-media collages illustrate connections between past and present, childhood experiences and works for civil rights and community good. Author's notes provide more political history, making the book a great read-aloud for any grade level. PK*

Peachtree. 32 pp. US\$16.95.

### This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness

Joyce Sidman. Ill. Pamela Zagarenski.

*An imaginary class of students writes poems apologizing to friends, family, and each other. Recipients of the poems respond with poems of forgiveness. The poems are written with deep emotion and feeling. Poems, like the one apologizing for euthanizing a pet dog, are very moving and will easily make connections with students.*

**CU:** *This book can be used to teach poetry by connecting to the reader. Poetry can be intimidating, but this book shows how things from your everyday life can become a poem. TL*

Houghton Mifflin. 48 pp. US\$16.00.

### The Titanic: An Interactive History Adventure

Bob Temple.

*Another in a series of You Choose Books, this interactive book invites readers to make choices in a familiar narrative. The Titanic history has been written, but could anything be done to change the outcome? Readers can immerse themselves in the event and view multiple perspectives to re-create 35 possible choices with 15 possible endings. Primary source photos immerse readers in the time period. CU: This book supports history standards and provides timelines, Internet sites, and multiple resources for research. Other Paths to Explore invites the reader to delve deeper. MM*

Capstone. 112 pp. US\$6.95.

### When Is a Planet Not a Planet? The Story of Pluto

Elaine Scott.

*This fascinating book traces the advances in our understanding of our solar system from the earliest humans through today. Readers will see that science is an ever-changing body of knowledge, and that scientific theories can change as new information is discovered. Supported by captivating photos, the text offers a clear explanation of Pluto's recent change in status. CU: This is the ideal book to illustrate the use of the scientific method and is highly recommended for any study of our solar system. STW*

Clarion. 48 pp. US\$17.00.

## Advanced

### The Brothers' War: Civil War Voices in Verse

J. Patrick Lewis.

*This stunningly designed book gives special insight to the Civil War by putting a human face and voice to statistics. The author uses different forms of poetry to*

match the subject and perspective of the war. Coupled with images taken by Civil War photographers, the poems allow the reader to live the history. **CU:** The personalization of the stories will enhance middle and high school Civil War curriculum. The author's concluding notes challenge high school poetry classes to bend their stories to the poetic. **NA**

National Geographic Children's Books. 48 pp. US\$17.95.

### Celeste's Harlem Renaissance

Eleanora E. Tate.

Harlem, the Colored world capital of the early 1900s, was the only place Celeste (Cece) Lassiter Massey could go when her father was confined to a tuberculosis sanitarium near home in Raleigh, NC. Upon arrival in New York, she discovered that her Aunt Val was not famous, just an aspiring performer who did menial work to support a meager lifestyle. Cece's prospects were bleak until her talent as a violinist provided a way for her aunt to work in the chorus line of a show. **CU:** Harlem Renaissance; music; theater. **JHB**

Little, Brown Young Readers. 288 pp. US\$15.99.

### Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam

Cynthia Kadohata.

Rick, 17 and uncertain of his future, enlists to serve in the Vietnam War. His battlefield experiences change him from a self-absorbed and impulsive young man into a disciplined soldier and dog handler, responsible for hundreds of lives. Rick's partner and protector is Cracker, a German shepherd who evolves from family pet into a highly skilled member of a military canine unit. Rick and Cracker's perspectives add realism to this heart-warming story. **CU:** Historical unit on wars, especially Vietnam; language arts study of point of view, voice, and perspectives. **CLD**

Atheneum. 320 pp. US\$16.99.

### I Am Rembrandt's Daughter

Lynn Cullen.

Based on historical facts about one of the world's most famous artists, this novel creates a realistic view of Amsterdam and life during the years of the Plague. Cullen blends issues of deception, family bonds, and a "love interest" into the lives of the characters. **CU:** This book could easily be used for studying character development as well as historical facts of the time period such as the Plague of Europe, and European art and history, as well as women's issues. **TF**

Bloomsbury USA Children's Books. 320 pp. US\$16.95.



From *Celeste's Harlem Renaissance* by Eleanora E. Tate. Used by permission of Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

### Napoleon: The Story of the Little Corporal

Robert Burleigh.

Burleigh's biography is creatively written using quotes from Napoleon Bonaparte. Artwork illustrates the quotes. Follow Napoleon across Europe and learn about his life. The bibliography, author's notes, and period paintings credit a true image of this historical figure. **CU:** This text could be used in art classes or to supplement a study of Napoleon. Budding artists and writers could use this format for inspiration to tell the stories of other famous figures. **LJG**

Abrams Books for Young Readers. 48 pp. US\$18.95.

### On My Journey Now: Looking at African-American History Through the Spirituals

Nikki Giovanni.

By using a very conversational style of writing, this novel gives insight into how the spiritual songs of slaves were used during their fearful Middle Passage journeys



From *Reaching for Sun* by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer. Copyright 2007 Bloomsbury Children's Books.

to auction blocks and eventually emancipation. Many influential and significant individuals are discussed in reference to the history of slavery and the Underground Railroad. **CU:** This book could be used to teach units on slavery and American history, as well as courses on religion. **JH**

Candlewick. 128 pp. US\$18.99.

### Reaching for Sun

Tracie Vaughn Zimmer.

*Josie, a seventh grader with cerebral palsy, struggles to find her place in the world. She lives with her mother and grandmother on a small portion of family farm not sold to developers. Josie's life becomes more interesting when Jordan, a science-minded geek, moves into the area. Their friendship carries Josie into summer when*

*life takes more twists and turns. **CU:** Written in free-verse, reluctant readers will enjoy the quick read while more mature readers will appreciate the poetic structure and figurative language. Josie's strong voice provides insights into life for persons with disabilities. **PK***

Bloomsbury USA Children's Books. 144 pp. US\$15.99.

### Sequoyah: Inventor of Written Cherokee

Roberta Basel.

*The life of Sequoyah is detailed in an easy-to-read-and-understand format. The reader learns how Sequoyah, a deeply committed Cherokee, developed the Cherokee written language. While describing his life, the reader is engaged by interesting facts and glimpses of life in the 1800s. **CU:** This book is formatted in a manner that will help students use it as a research tool. Included is an effective timeline using pictures and captions. The book could also be used with a lesson about source notes. **TL***

Compass Point. 112 pp. US\$5.95.

### Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood

Ibtisam Barakat.

*This first-person memoir of a young Palestinian girl's memory of the Six-Day War in Ramallah paints the perspective of war from a child's point of view. When the bombing ceases and the dust settles, the protagonist's mother advises her daughter to forget, but she wants to remember. The young refugee shares the joy of discovering literacy; her language and literacy empower her voice to share her story. **CU:** This autobiographical text provides a wonderful springboard for current events and point of view in literature. **MM***

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 192 pp. US\$16.00.

### Tracking Trash: Flotsam, Jetsam, and the Science of Ocean Motion

Loree Griffin Burns.

*Appealing page layouts incorporating text, photographs, and maps invite even the most reluctant upper elementary and middle school readers to meet Dr. Curtis Ebbesmeyer and his band of trash trackers. By following the ocean adventures of everything from Nike shoes to bathtub toys, Dr. Ebbesmeyer and his trusty computer program OSCURS have documented ocean currents and surface water movement. **CU:** This book will enhance studies of oceanography, environmental resources, careers, hobbies, and the scientific method. (Review written by Phyllis Rado for Susan T. White.)*

Houghton Mifflin. 64 pp. US\$18.00.