Children's Literature Hawai'i and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa present

The Fifteenth Biennial
Conference on Literature and Hawai'i's Children

Featuring Linda Sue Park and Brian Selznick

A Humanities Guide to Children's Literature:

Inventing Worlds, Imaginary AND Real

June 17~19, 2010
Campus Center
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Honolulu, Hawai'i

THE CONFERENCE on Literature and Hawai'i's Children is a biennial event for all who share an interest in the literature of children, including students, parents, teachers, librarians, writers, and illustrators.

Cultivating a Love of Literature through Personal Connection with Award-Winning Authors Linda Sue Park and Brian Selznick

By Sherry Rose

Linda Sue Park

Brian Selznick

CULTIVATING LITERATURE appreciation is the goal of teachers and librarians everywhere and is intimately linked to relationship with those who author and illustrate stories. A personal connection with a writer or an artist who illustrates books is not only a delight but may well be the most influential motivator for literature appreciation for children and adults alike. This year, Children's Literature Hawai'i is pleased to feature author Linda Sue Park and illustrator/author Brian Selznick.

When reading or listening to a story, readers constantly interact with authors and illustrators. It is this interaction that enhances the reading/listening experience and creates lifelong appreciation. Strong reaction is integral to the way readers engage in the reading process. Meeting a published author or illustrator provides the opportunity to forge a rich, powerful connection between reader and literature.

In her article "Connecting Live Authors, Students, and the Love of Reading," Ellen Rubin quotes teacher Jaime LaPolla, who describes the long-term impact of author or illustrator visits on teens' reading. "Having real authors come here makes the students want to read their books before and after their visits." Ms. Rubin makes the case that visiting authors not only discuss their backgrounds and provide valuable insights about writing; they also dispel the notion of writers as somehow mysterious and unapproachable. Visiting illustrators often amaze the students as they describe and demonstrate their craft, but they also bring a sense of the illustrator as an approachable person and interested in what students may be experiencing as they work on their projects.

Dr. Joseph Sanacore states in "Supporting an Effective Visiting Authors' Program" that students benefit from direct exposure to authors as they discover what inspires them, gain insights about the act of writing, and come to realize "that even professional writers experience joys and frustrations when developing their craft." Live author or illustrator visits motivate, inspire, promote reading, and create vivid and powerful connections for students.

Linda Sue Park's official website http://www.lindasuepark.com offers information and links that provide a sense of who she is as a person and what she believes as a writer. "Read. That's the single best thing an aspiring writer can do for his or her work … Whether a wondrous story or a hilarious passage of dialogue or a beautiful sentence or a memorable image, every bit of reading I do helps my own writing." She shares reading lists from her childhood and of what she loves to read now. She even contributes trivia games for guests to enjoy.

When the imaginative, humorous Ms. Park spoke at the American Association of School Librarians Conference in October 2009, this graduate of Stanford University impressed us with her wit and intense passion for her work. Her respect for family, heritage, and history was evident, not only in the subject matter of her books but also in the joyful introduction of her parents at this event. Her cultural appeal stems not only from her Korean-American ethnicity, but also in the careful way she has incorporated language, customs, food, and accurate history into her stories.

Though her narratives generally focus on Korea or Korean-Americans, she implements a wide range of historical settings in her stories. Park travels to seventeenth-century Korea *(Seesaw Girl*), WWII Japanese-occupied Korea (*When My Name Was Keoko*), twelfth-century Korea (*A Single Shard*), early 1950s Brooklyn, New York (*Keeping Score*), contemporary Chicago, Illinois (*Project Mulberry*). Linda Sue Park is meticulous in her research and includes author notes at the end of each book to explain historical context. She provides bibliographies for readers interested in more information on the milieu she explores.

Access Brian Selznick online at http://www.theinventionofhugocabret.com, and you will discover that The Rhode Island School of Design provided him with formal art training. "The Weird Websites I Like" page on this site gives an indication of his personality. He says, "I always like to look at websites that have lots of strange and interesting stuff." His favorite websites include virtual tours of weird houses, cut paper art, miniatures of

impending disasters, optical illusions, and mind-boggling sculptures made from colored paper.

As an artist, Mr. Selznick pays particular attention to detail. Take note of the research he and author Pam Muñoz Ryan detail in the author/illustrator notes for their book, *When Marian Sang*. Both writer and illustrator read extensively, visited historical sites, and exhausted a visual search of the archives at the Metropolitan Opera. The artwork in their book was created in Liquitex Acrylics. The review states, "Pam Muñoz Ryan's text is as moving as a libretto, and … Brian Selznick's pictures are as exquisitely detailed and elaborately designed as a stage set."

This detailed reflection is likewise true of the research for his independent writing. Filmmaker Georges Méliès is a very important part of Selznick's Caldecott Award-winning book, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*. Brian Selznick provides links on his website that allow us to share knowledge about Méliès. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* is a story told in words and pictures, and the nearly 300 pages of punctilious drawings were created in pencil on watercolor paper.

Selznick's eclectic nature is evident in the wide variety of projects he has illustrated over the years. These include the fantasy *Doll People* series by Ann Martin and Andrew Clements' realistic school stories, such as *Frindle* and *Lunch Money*. His illustrations in Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Riding Freedom* and her biography of the African-American opera singer Marion Anderson show the striking versatility in his style.

A previous collaboration on *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride* by Ryan and Selznick garnered a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*: Selznick's illustrations "capture the vibrancy of his subjects and evoke the feel of a more glamorous era." *Booklist* praised the "simply wonderful pencil illustrations." Such triumphant collaboration shows a willingness to cooperate, demonstrates the ability to compromise and the capacity to work well with others.

The historical nature of Linda Sue Park's stories and the rich cultural Korean-American influence of her work have a positive impact on the young people who meet her. Her interest in food and her wonderful sense of humor make her an appealing speaker, and her ethnic diversity inspires understanding about the wider world.

The value of meeting Brian Selznick either as purely an illustrator or as author **and** illustrator of award-winning works cannot be overstated. His professional expertise excites admiration and invigorates those who have the chance to examine his art with his guidance.

Children's Literature Hawai'i Conference attendees will leave with renewed passion about literature as two of our best contemporary storytellers personalize the visiting author/illustrator experience for us. Connecting in person with Linda Sue Park and Brian Selznick will enrich our lives and help us encourage our children in their future literary encounters.

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Detail and Mystery: The Illustrations of Brian Selznick

Suzanne Kosanke

"ANY PROPER INTRODUCTION to Brian Selznick should open with red velvet curtains," writes Scholastic Books executive editor Tracy Mack. She adds, "You can feel his warmth, his coltish energy, his passion and charisma." When he goes to work on a book, he gives 110% (407). Earning a Caldecott Medal in 2008 for *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (picture book/graphic novel/silent movie), Selznick has chosen an impressive range of topics since his first book *The Houdini Box* (1991). His doll series (*Doll Face Has a Party*, 1994; *The Doll People*, 2000; *The Meanest Doll in the World*, 2002; *The Runaway Dolls*, 2008), use of school themes (*Frindle*, 1996; *The School Story*, 2001; *Lunch Money*, 2005) and his non-fiction biographies (*When Marian Sang*, 2002; *Walt Whitman: Words for America*, 2004) all combine vivid detail with a vague mysteriousness sure to keep readers intrigued.

Curious about what kept readers interested in a book, I asked students in my Fall 2009 Children's Literature course to describe how author Ursula K. Le Guin makes her fantasy world of Earthsea seem believable to readers. They came up with a long list. She uses seasons like ours, maps show all the Earthsea islands, the hero has very human emotions, a history is provided for the various Earthsea cultures, and—most important—all those detailed descriptions. However, one perceptive student said it was the *combination* of detail and vagueness that should be credited for bringing Earthsea to life. This seems to be Selznick's strategy, as well.

Marly's Ghost: A Remix of Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol (2006) combines extensive detail with a refusal to supply all the answers. Author David Levithan uses the same tactic when he has a character say: "There are no metaphors, no words for such a feeling. You are left with no doubt, and endless doubt" (3). How does an illustrator show this? This book's illustrations resemble the fine-lined ink drawings in George Cruikshank's *Oliver Twist* (1838), heavily crosshatched uneven-edged ovals, many with titles in fancy italic script. Author and illustrator join forces to provide details but no answers as Ben (a.k.a. Ebenezer) faces the ghost of Marly, who turns out to be his recently deceased 16-year-old girlfriend.

The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins (2001) is subtitled "An Illuminating History of Mr. Waterhouse Hawkins, Artist and Lecturer." The title page, resembling a circus poster, also explains that Selznick's drawings "are based on the original sketches of Mr. Hawkins," an English sculptor (1807-94) famous for his extensive knowledge of natural history and zoology. For this book Selznick started with pencil sketches with the final version in acrylic paints with pencil outlines (Transcript).

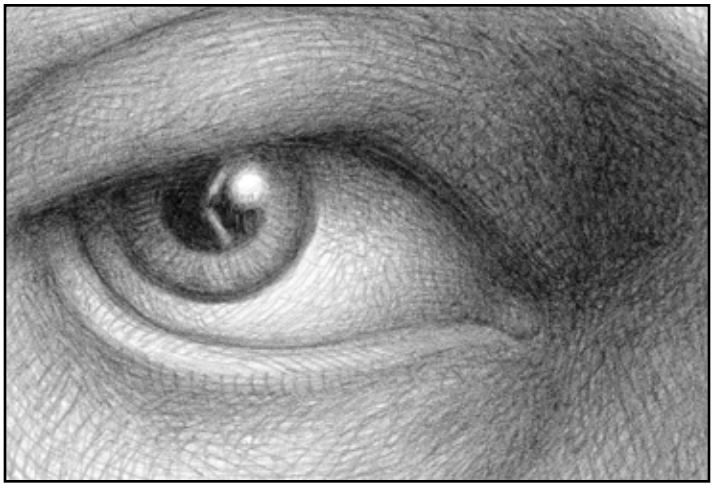

Illustration from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, copyright 2007 by Brian Selznick. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

The first scene of 1853 London shows many details—tavern names, address numbers, contemporary fashion, street cobblestones—but we readers focus on one mysterious figure in a red coat surrounded by green dinosaurs hovering in his imagination. It's difficult to believe these days—when any four-year-old can tell you what a dinosaur looks like—but in 1853, although various dinosaur fossils had been discovered, no one had attempted to construct a model. This was Waterhouse's intention, and the height of his success came when forty thousand people, including Queen Victoria, attended the opening of the Crystal Palace in Sydenham Park. (These creations can still be viewed, though an author's note admits they are inaccurate based on what we now know. That doesn't "make them any less valuable. Waterhouse's models are what first got people excited about dinosaurs. We're still excited, 150 years later" [Kerley, "Author's Note"]).

Selznick shows Waterhouse's detailed planning process, his many sketches, his successes (a dinner party inside an Iguanodon model!) and failures (New York's Boss Tweed kept him from building a New York dinosaur museum, destroying all his models and burying them in Central Park). The "Illustrator's Note" explains Selznick's extensive research process and the lucky discovery of Waterhouse's own photos and drawings. All Selznick's illustrations came from this primary source material though he admits to adding a goose (that had bitten him) and making up the architectural plan of the American museum. On the final page, a mysterious young artist-to-be is sketching a bird. Deep in the ground below his park bench, we see all those destroyed fragments from Tweed's vandalism, never found or recovered, though it's clear they

are providing inspiration to this young naturalist. (See www.indiebound.org/author-interviews/selznick for a photo of Selznick sitting under an Iguanadon.)

For *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (also about a historic figure) Selznick uses finely crosshatched pencil drawings. Close-ups of a boot, an eye, a watch alternate with longer shots of buildings and rooms. A locomotive comes closer and closer … and closer in a three-page sequence. Illustrations gradually take over the text of this 533-page book; the first set has 2" margins which soon reduce to 1" and then to ¼" for the remainder of the book. It's easy to understand why Selznick won the Caldecott award for this multi-genre hybrid. "Acknowledgements" and "Credits" pages reveal his range and depth of research during the three years he worked on *Hugo*: he visited Paris three times, watched many French films, even consulted clock-makers. Selznick's original intention was to use one drawing per chapter, but he changed his mind, wanting readers to connect with illustrations first rather than with text ("Author"). He does offer a brief preface by Professor H. Alcofrisbas (whose identity readers won't discover until much later), which explains little and offers only mysteries. (For wonderful video clips describing this book's process, see http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/selznick.)

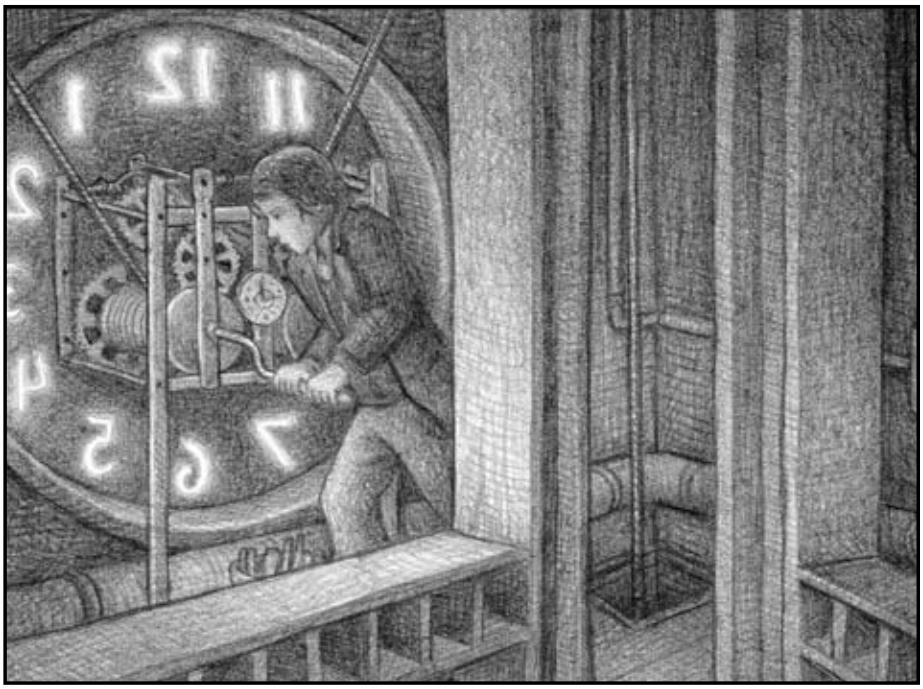

Illustration from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, copyright 2007 by Brian Selznick. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

As a college student, Selznick wanted to work in set design. Although he loved children's literature, he was determined NOT to be an illustrator of children's books since everyone said that's what he *should* be. It was working in New York's now-closed Eeyore's Books for Children that he received his education in children's literature, published his first book and changed course. Given the range of his interests, it's impossible to predict what his next project will be, but it's sure to be wonderful.

To learn more about *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, Remy Charlip and Georges Méliès, plus Selznick's favorite "weird" websites, go to: http://www.theinventionofhugocabret.com/about_brian_bio.htm

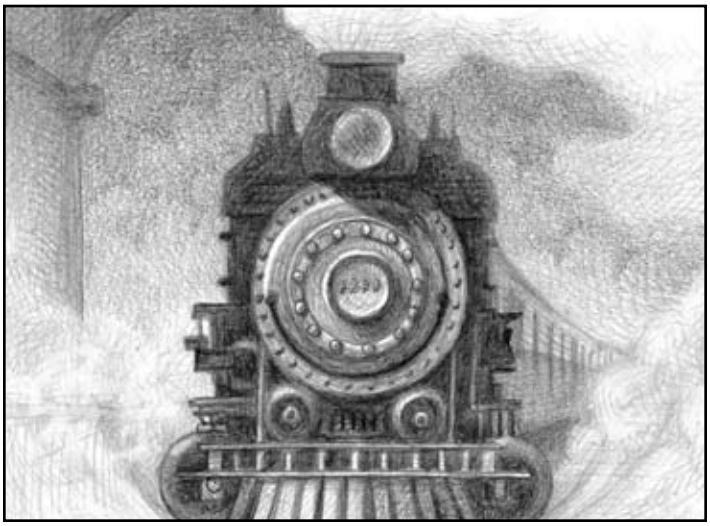

Illustration from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, copyright 2007 by Brian Selznick. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

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Koryŏ, More Than a Vase

Edward J. Shultz

KORYŎ IS CHRONOLOGICALLY a long kingdom stretching nearly 500 years from 918 to 1392. This article examines Koryŏ in terms of leadership and the changes in the leadership that governed the Koryŏ kingdom as well as its social, economic, cultural, and intellectual developments. In broad terms, historians divide Koryŏ into early and late, with the rise of the military in 1170 marking the division. These two sections can likewise be further divided into two periods, with early Koryŏ comprising the age of *hojok* (hegemons or strongmen) (918-981) and civil aristocrats (981-1170), and later Koryŏ comprising military rule (1170-1270) and plural leadership (1270-1392), a time of Mongol intervention. Dividing the kingdom into two and then four periods based on those who ruled evolves naturally in that the dynastic histories, the richest sources for the study of Koryŏ, focus on the ruling class and provide the greatest detail about leadership. Although this piece will make every effort to discover the lives and habits of the entire society, dividing the kingdom into these periods based on those who governed is the clearest and easiest way to delineate Koryŏ.

Koryŏ Overview

Although the kingdom witnessed four periods of leadership, the primacy of civilians, men of letters, remained a constant throughout the kingdom. This is not to say there was no tension between those who sought to govern by a reliance on arms in opposition to those who chose to invoke civil restraint. In fact one of the primary tensions underlying much of the inner dynamic of Koryŏ was competition between the military officer and the civil official. This tension led to the rise of generals to authority through military coup d'état in 1170.

Koryŏ was a dynamic society that constantly had to deal with many competing agendas as it sought equilibrium. Complementing the struggles between the military and the civil were serious questions over who was most fit to govern. Should men hold office based on their lineage or their innate ability? Scholars returning from China wished to introduce new systems in which men advanced based on merit, but they had to contend with traditions rooted in the previous Silla kingdom (ended 935) that deemed birth was the most important criterion to consider in who should govern. Although Koryŏ would remain largely an aristocratic society, it did allow avenues for those truly gifted in intellect to advance to positions of authority. A few scholars argue vigorously that Koryŏ was a bureaucratic state in which merit was key to gaining a promotion; most assert on the contrary that lineage was prime. In looking at governance issues, there were also clear tensions between the ruling officialdom and royal authority. Kings constantly struggled throughout the history of the kingdom to assert their primacy only to have their power repeatedly checked by an assertive officialdom. Although a civil, aristocratic officialdom controlled Koryŏ for much of its nearly five-hundred-year history, its authority was constantly contested by competing interests.

For much of the first half of the dynasty, the time during which *A Single Shard* takes place, civil aristocrats did dominate; however, in late Koryŏ the nature of Koryŏ leadership has been debated by scholars. More traditional scholars have seen the military period as a "dark age" during which the kingdom sank into social, political, and economic collapse. Newer interpretations have revised this view and provide a more positive, constructive interpretation of many of Koryŏ's military leaders and institutional innovations. Similarly, during the last century of Koryŏ rule, some scholars see the rise of a whole new class of officials called *sadaebu,* who were well versed in Confucian principles then popular in China and economically based in the countryside where they possessed some land. These men, according to this theory, overthrew the central elite who owned large tracts of land and were affiliated with Buddhism. Others counter that this is a false dichotomy as many of the elite families of early Koryŏ continued to effect policy well into the new Chosŏn kingdom.

Scholars often contend that even today in South Korea blood, place, and learning dictate a person's success. In other words, to be truly successful a person must be a member of a distinguished family, come from a region of political dominance, and attend the correct schools. This certainly seems to be the case for men of Koryŏ, too. Lineage (or blood) governed one's advance as did education or training in the classics. Locality also played a role. Every person of note came from a lineage that linked itself back to a specific locality or *pongwan,* also known as ancestral seat. Without such a link, an individual was not fit to govern. The origin of individuals was always a question that loomed in dynastic decisions, and tied to this issue was the quest of men of rural origins to enter into the central government hierarchy. There was an ongoing tension between the central authority and rural interests, forcing the state constantly to try to accommodate the demands of the region with those of the center. To contain the aspirations of the countryside and at the same time to tap its resources, the central authority had to balance its needs with the demands of those far from the capital. Although Koryŏ achieved a unique balance that allowed considerable local autonomy, questions concerning the intrusion of the central government into the countryside appear continually throughout the kingdom.

Control over resources was another tension that

confronted Koryŏ. As an agricultural kingdom, management of the land was key to its successful operation. Koryŏ scholars have long debated the nature of the land system, and the degree to which the central government exercised control over land throughout the country. It has become increasingly evident that Koryŏ did not experience feudalism in that the central state remained a key agent in most land matters and there were both public and private land designations at this time. For this land system to function, a strong civil authority was mandatory, and this perhaps as much as any factor explains Koryŏ's ongoing dependence on the primacy of the civilian.

In addition to control over the land was the need to control people, which leads to the issue of slavery in Koryŏ. Scholars are unable to agree on the exact nature of the *nobi,* which were people frequently described as roughly equivalent to the slave in the West. Control over the *nobi* was a key element of the wealth of many men and also a cause of contention throughout the kingdom. Scholars disagree on the extent and significance of the *nobi* in Koryŏ, as well as whether the term can be accurately translated as "slave."

Koryŏ's relations with other kingdoms and China have long been debated. Although Koryŏ had frequent exchanges with the dynasty in power in China and borrowed Chinese institutions and ideas to shape its own traditions, Koryŏ was not a dependent state and did pursue when necessary policies that went counter to Chinese interests. There were strong Chinese influences impacting Koryŏ, but Korea developed a unique society that clearly distinguished itself from China. The most trying period of Koryŏ's existence came when the Mongols forcefully took over Korea (1270-mid 14th century), and yet even in this period of turmoil the people of Koryŏ aggressively asserted an independent posture. Koryŏ's strength rests in part on its ability to accept outside influences and work them into producing a dynamic state.

The 12th Century

Linda Sue Park's *A Single Shard* unfolds in the mid 12th-century, a time of towering intellectual and artistic achievement, but also a period that saw many of the tensions discussed above slowly pulling the kingdom apart. Koryŏ artisans had refined the production of celadon to such an art that even the Chinese acknowledged its superior color. These same artisans gave life to their vessels, often forming them into lions or ducks or inlaying them with birds or plants, but it was their unequaled use of glazes that gave their works a rich, jade-like appearance that has never been equaled to this day. Kilns were set up in several locations around the country but Koryŏ's southwestern area, as described in *A Single Shard*, was the center of the finest production.

A Single Shard takes place primarily in rural Koryŏ, and it was the peasants who lived there who performed a key role in Koryŏ as it was their labor that fed the country and provided the taxes to finance the administration. Within the peasant class there were many differing standards of living. Some were well-to-do and prospered; others lived in abject poverty. The court, when ruled by diligent monarchs, strove to protect the peasants from undue exploitation, uttering a steady stream of statements calling for compassion toward the peasantry and encouraging the tillers of the land to work diligently. Central officials also went to great extremes to meet the essential needs of the peasantry and dispatched officials to ensure their proper management. The state maintained a system of public granaries that were to provide grain in times of hardship. A 12th-century visitor from China noted several times that these granaries, which were in various parts of the country, were ready to meet emergencies. The effectiveness of the granary system depended on able officials knowing when to attend to peasant needs. Beyond opening granaries, the state frequently exempted peasants from paying taxes when flood, famine, or drought hit an area. Peasants, if they were industrious, could frequently find ways to improve their life. One way to advance was by being selected into the army and promoted into the officer corps, and the histories offer many examples of such mobility. There are also many examples of men who lived in poverty and ultimately, because of merit, such as being outstanding artists, advanced to become leading statesmen.

Conclusion

Many of the tensions noted above contributed directly to the vigor and vibrancy of Koryŏ and help explain the creative genius behind the people of Koryŏ. Koryŏ was a period that produced exquisite celadon pottery as well as magnificent Buddhist paintings. Koryŏ excelled in the fine arts and also produced a high level of scholarship and literature. The people of Koryŏ probed and questioned their existence and focused on the study of Buddhism and Confucianism as well as other endeavors in searching for equilibrium to their lives.

Koryŏ built on the foundations established by Silla, and yet also developed new traditions that marked Koryŏ as a distinct age in Korea's long history. Some see Koryŏ as a transitional period, and certainly this is true in that every period is transitional. The warrior aristocrat governed Silla and lineage determined one's future. By the rise of Chosŏn (1392-1910) which succeeded Koryŏ, a new standard emerged in which the *yangban* elite or a literati class based in part on learning emerged to control the country. Clearly Chosŏn is distinct from Silla, and it was Koryŏ that wrought this change. Koryŏ successfully balanced numerous competing tensions and molded the imported with the indigenous to produce an equilibrium that survived nearly five hundred years. Koryŏ was a period of crisis and prosperity; it experienced peaks and valleys, but through it all Koryŏ people exhibited spontaneity, vitality, and intelligence.

Isn't It Time to Bring Back the Classics?

By Nancy Alpert Mower

BY "THE CLASSICS" I mean classic children's books that were widely read and loved during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but are rarely read by today's children.

When many excellent children's books, such as those of Linda Sue Park, are published every year, I can understand why children, as well as their parents, librarians, and teachers, want to read contemporary books. I'm not suggesting that older books replace today's books; I'm suggesting that some of yesterday's classics be read in addition to current books. To do this, our busy children might have to give up some television or internet or video game time.

Two of my favorite authors are Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888) and Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957). Alcott wrote about New England during the Civil War period, while Wilder wrote about migration to and development of the Midwestern prairies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Alcott's first book for children, *Little Women,* published in 1868, was instantly successful. She told the story of four sisters, basing many incidents and all the characters on her own family while giving herself and her sisters fictitious names.

My mother recommended *Little Women* to me when I was thirteen, saying she had loved it at that age. I read it at least three times that year. The March girls were for a while my closest friends. As I plunged into the story, I felt the tug of tomboyism that pulled at Jo, the main character. I wanted to wear fine clothes and dance with Meg at parties. I was stunned by the teacher's inhumane treatment of little Amy, and I wondered how anyone could be as kind and sweet as Beth. The characters were genuine and believable. They quarreled, as sisters will, but had fun together.

When I returned to my beloved novel as an adult, I was shocked by something I hadn't noticed as a child. The girls were constantly exhorted to be good; the reader was constantly reminded of how proper "little women" should behave. The author took time out to preach to her readers. I didn't remember any of this from my earlier readings. I remembered only the action, the exciting adventures, and the fascinating characters.

Some contemporary scholars are unusually harsh with Alcott, attacking in particular her didacticism. They are criticizing a nineteenth-century book by twentieth-century standards. We adults tend to do that. I don't think a contemporary child would be any more bothered by the didacticism than I was at age thirteen.

Little Women was followed by *Little Men*, in which Jo and her husband start a school for boys. The third book in the trilogy, *Jo's Boys*, describes the lives of the characters from *Little Men* ten years later. Alcott went on to write many more books for children, all of them well loved in the nineteenth century and at least the first half of the twentieth.

In the 142 years since *Little Women* was first published, it's never been out of print. It was the first book in this country written about teenagers (a term not in use in Alcott's day), and it was the first family novel, to be followed by numerous others, including the "Little House" books of Laura Ingalls Wilder.

I didn't know about Wilder's books when I was a child. My sophomore year in college, I took a class in American Social Literature that focused primarily on the Westward movement of the late nineteenth century. We read mostly primary sources—letters and diaries. One day our professor told us that if we really wanted to know what life was like on the prairies in those days, we should read the Little House books.

I read them and loved them. Later on, they were to become the bedtime stories I read to my children. Although the books are mostly about girls, my sons enjoyed them as much as my daughters did.

Like Alcott, Wilder wrote stories about events, activities, and adventures based on those of her own family. Unlike Alcott, Wilder used the actual names of family members for her characters. The sisters were Mary, Laura, Carrie, and Grace. The parents were called Ma and Pa.

When Wilder was in her sixties, she mined her memory all the way back to childhood and put her reflections into books for children. Her first thought was to relate stories her father had told his children as they were growing up. Her writing quickly moved on from Pa's stories to events in her life, and blossomed into an eight-book series, beginning when Laura was a small child, three or four years old, and ending with her marriage at age eighteen.

The series begins with *The Little House in the Big Woods*. This is a small gray log house in Wisconsin surrounded by trees. Bears live in the Big Woods, as do huge wildcats, foxes, and wolves, but Laura knows she's safe inside the solid log walls. In the daytime Pa hunts deer and bear and fishes in a nearby lake. He's the sole provider for his family, and Ma makes all their clothes. Occasionally they get together for parties with other relatives and friends who also live in the Big Woods. Pa plays the fiddle, and everybody dances. Pa fiddles at home in the evenings, often singing along, and his music helps the girls fall asleep.

After *Little House in the Big Woods*, Laura wrote *Farmer Boy* about the childhood of Almanzo Wilder on a large farm in northern New York State. In spite of his many chores, Almanzo enjoys working with his father and brother

on the farm; he particularly likes caring for the cows and horses. Like the Ingalls, the Wilders provide for nearly all their own food and clothing, except once a year when the shoemaker comes to the farmhouse to make each child a new pair of shoes. The family is happy and comfortable, and Almanzo has exciting adventures.

In the sixth book, *The Long Winter,* Almanzo Wilder meets Laura Ingalls, and in the eighth book, *These Happy Golden Years*, they get married.

After *Farmer Boy*, Laura returned to writing about the Ingalls family. Pa is restless. Too many people are moving into the Big Woods, and there are now few animals for him to hunt. He packs his family and household goods into a covered wagon, and they move to Indian Territory in what is now Kansas. Thus begins *The Little House on the Prairie*. At the end of that book, Pa hears that the government is sending soldiers to take white settlers out of Indian Territory. Once again the family packs up the covered wagon and moves on. They go north again, ending up in Minnesota, the setting for *On Banks of Plum Creek*.

At the beginning of the next book, *On the Shores of Silver Lake,* we learn that Mary has had scarlet fever. It settled in her eyes, leaving her blind. Pa says that from now on Laura must be Mary's eyes. This is when Laura begins to observe and to describe what she sees in rich detail and vivid colors, probably a forerunner of her writing ability. In this book the family leaves Minnesota and moves to Dakota Territory, where Pa establishes a homestead. The homestead and the nearby town of DeSmet, South Dakota, become the settings for the last three books.

Why should children read these classics?

For one thing, they tell us something about our country. For another, they encompass humanities values, such as the importance of strong family relationships, developing self-reliance, and caring for others. More importantly, they contain exciting and interesting stories that are fun to read.

Most of today's children spend a lot of time with the intriguing Harry Potter books. Older children and young adults are fascinated with the Twilight series and the many fantasy and vampire books that followed those publications. Fantasy is fun to read because it takes us to entirely new and different worlds. Books by Alcott and Wilder also take us to entirely new and different worlds—worlds that at one time actually existed.

A blurb in one of the Harper Trophy editions of the Little House books reads as follows:

"Any boy or girl who has access to all the books in the series will be the richer for their first-hand record of pioneer life in the opening West and for their warm-hearted human values." – *The New Yorker*

There's the answer. Children will be richer for reading some of the earlier children's classics.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Little Women (1868)
An Old Fashioned Girl (1870)
Little Men (1871)
Eight Cousins (1875)
Rose in Bloom (1876)
Under the Lilacs (1878)
Jack and Jill (1880)
Jo's Boys (1886)

LITTLE HOUSE BOOKS BY LAURA INGALLS WILDER

Little House in the Big Woods (1932)
Farmer Boy (1933)
Little House on the Prairie (1935)
On the Banks of Plum Creek (1937)
By the Shores of Silver Lake (1939)
The Long Winter (1940)
Little Town on the Prairie (1941)
These Happy Golden Years (1943)

Not "Us" and "Them" but All of Us

By Lorna Hershinow

I WAS CHEERED recently by a long interview on NPR. Terry Gross was talking with James Cameron about *Avatar,* and the director-writer expressed amazement that "there's been almost zero dialogue about the fact that you have a major action movie where the main character is disabled, which I think is actually unprecedented."

The family-supporting youth outreach program Celebrate Reading has made its own unprecedented bid in 2010 to foster dialogue on coping with disability. We're getting close to the different and very likeable protagonists of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Lottery,* and falling for the blind romantic character in *The Schwa Was Here*. We're committed to reading literature in order to understand that falling by chance along a wide range of ability doesn't need to separate us from one another as people. Our annual multi-cultural reading lists have shown us most interested in dialogue that supports respect for ethnic culture and gay culture. Until now we have left disability culture under-examined.

Those who have a loved friend or a family member who deals on a daily basis with some notable learning or physical disability have been freed from what psychologists call the harmful stance of "us" versus "other" positionality. What people can learn from disability advocates can be taken in even more enduringly from fiction writers: our similarities

link us as people; our differences can better be celebrated than be made the false grounds for division, injustice, and condescension.

For instance, just because most people walk and value their easy mobility, many wrongly believe that every effort must be made to avoid the use of a wheelchair when that is possible. Sure, muscle atrophy is a disadvantage to consider, but why expect people for whom walking is painful or exhausting to want to walk so much they should be prepared to blur out their thinking with addictive painkillers? I wish more teens would read Steven Brown's essay "Hooked on Symptoms: Drug Abuse from a Disability Perspective":

> Using a wheelchair—a vehicle little different than a car—for mobility reopened the world for me. Once again I could go enjoy going shopping, without having to worry about rapid fatigue or pain. I could go places where people queued up in lines because while using my chair I no longer cared how a wait might affect my body. Once more I enjoyed going out with family and friends. When I returned from such activities after having used a wheelchair, I felt much fresher than when I tried the same activities with my legs. So I no longer needed to turn to painkillers every time I extended myself. For me, use of a wheelchair has meant both a greater capacity to participate in life and a healthier body with which to participate. (51)

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Brown, a Disabilities Scholar at UHM's Center on Disabilities Studies who has composed a poem about his wheelchair being his friend, married his close friend Lillian, who spends some of her time offering workshops that celebrate the sexuality of people with disability. That support is needed in a world in which many wrongly presume that some other people are not just like them in desire and need for intimacy.

Young readers need to become friendly with teenagers like Jason Moorehouse in the YA novel *Rules,* who rightly believes that friendship can lead to romance. He accepts his wheelchair, like his communication book that allows him speech, as essential to his identity. He and his mother meet Catherine when she joins her mother and autistic brother in the Occupational Therapy waiting room. A friendship between the teens develops over time, with Catherine writing and illustrating word-cards for his book. Jason knows that having a wheelchair means he can go for a walk with an appealing teenage girl, and wheel out onto their club floor with her at a dance. She presumes, though, that he sees his chair as a limiter and not a tool, and illustrates the word "together" by showing them sitting side by side on a bench at the park they went to together. Jason's protest against including this depiction in his communication book, carried in words he points to, dramatizes his strong sense of self and worth:

> **Where? Wheelchair.** Jason pulls his brows together. "I imagined you without it. Like in your dream where you can run."
> **Want. Wheelchair. In. Picture.**
> "I just thought---"
> **Take. It. Out.** Jason looks away, frowning.
> (Lord 165-66)

Lord makes her character Catherine someone who has learned a lot from having to help her autistic brother. Her adaptation to her brother's needs makes her a sympathetic member of her larger community, and someone who can honor Jason's ability to adapt to limitations and find him attractive. Lord is herself a loving parent of two children, who wrote her novel to show not only how differently her autistic child sees the world, but also how similar "a full experience of family life with a child with autism" is to any family in which siblings and parents adapt to each other's real differences.

When young readers encounter such family life in novels and meet mostly supportive and sometimes anguished family members, they ask big questions about love and happiness and selfhood, drop limiting assumptions, and gain new perspectives. Terry Trueman's *Stuck in Neutral*, for instance, wins over many reader-friends for fourteen-year-old Shawn, whose inability to speak or move—or control any muscle at all—results from cerebral palsy as severe as Trueman's own son Sheehan's. Yet Shawn enjoys the play of his brilliant mind and his family's love—even though his parents and brother and sister do not understand his happiness at being alive. His body does not register what readers can—Shawn's wide and deep range of responses, whether intellectual, emotional, sexual, or humorous. Shawn's father, shut out from his son's inner life as readers are not, is convinced Shawn deserves to be freed from a life he sees as unbearable confinement.

The author, who met with readers on O'ahu, Hawai'i, and Maui this year as part of Celebrate Reading, believes that creating this individual teenager means that "every healthy typical teenager, librarian, English teacher etc, sees him- or herself in Shawn McDaniel, and thus cares about him, not because he's disabled but because they have taken the time to know him." He believes—and so do I after visiting with teen literature circles discussing Shawn and his family—they are forever changed by their reading "in the way they look at that guy in the wheelchair—it's the most important thing I've

done and justification for my taking up space on the planet."

Readers can make friends with other writers who help us to think hard about living in that justified way. VSA-Hawai'i affords support to middle and high schoolers at www.vsarts.org/writingspotlights, where they can read short literary pieces by writers with a disability, and come to think deeply about diversity and the necessary struggle to adapt and change. Readers who meet Kenny Fries in this way will be helped to think planet-sized thoughts about the power of a circle of loving relatives and friends to contribute to civilized living. Being born by chance without long bones in his legs has not kept Fries from traveling and hiking more extensively than most of us. We readers in Hawai'i are hoping he will come to Hawaii next year to help us talk about *The History of My Shoes and the Evolution of Darwin's Theory*. This unusual memoir alternates between Darwin's long years of struggle for understanding his discoveries (including his collaborative relationship with the biologist and evolutionary theorist Wallace), and Fries's own long struggle to adapt to the world with his odd legs and feet, undertaken with his long-time partner Ian.

> As man advanced in civilization, Darwin noted, small tribes became united into larger communities. Each individual began extending his social instincts toward all members of the tribe and eventually to members of the same nation, even though these people were personally unknown to him. Darwin concluded that once this point was reached, only artificial barriers prevented an individual's sympathies from extending to the members of all nations and races.
>
> Is this what people with disabilities offer to society: an example of the importance of interdependence, of community? Is this how people with a physical difference help the human species survive? (163-164)

I know that it's easy to take kids to meet Charles Darwin and his family in *Creation* and that they'll be eager to see the film. But we should encourage them to read a novel and experience empathy while connecting with a different individual for many hours at a stretch. Readers give more of themselves and therefore gain more insight than movie-goers when they form a relationship with an adaptive individual who deals with more than the usual challenges life affords.

We teachers and parents need to boost teens into the world of Marcelo Sandoval, whose parents differ in their readiness to accept his Asperger-like differences and whose creator, Francisco Stork, in the novel *Marcelo in the Real World*, examines the ethics of family, courtship, and law in ways that cannot translate to two hours on the screen. Most of us have gained a great deal of understanding from watching the bio-pic *Temple Grandin*, and we are grateful for the display of this famous autistic scientist's visual thinking. Still, to appreciate where disability rights fit into the civil rights movement and to become more civil citizens of the world, we all need book-length conversation with Grandin and with friendly activists like Steven Brown.

We need to be transported and made to change our assumptions by the writing of Kenny Fries, which can take us traveling to the Galapagos Islands, Japan, up mountains and into scientific thinking and successful relationships. Teenagers will benefit by Jonathan Friesen's personal experience of Tourette Syndrome and how twitching muscles can exacerbate self-consciousness during high school years. If we help them to read novels like *Jerk California,* they will reciprocate by creating a more equitable world.

Steven Brown has protested the inequality in the treatment of non-disabled and those with disability, calling it American apartheid. In a plain-speaking short essay "The Truth About Telethons" he declares the dangers of "the telethon mentality":

> While disability advocates continue to insist that we want to be integrated into a society organized to allow us access to all its avenues, telethons continue to segregate us as a population to be pitied, to be identified as distinct, and to be helped. The truth about telethons is that they are mechanisms of segregation. The truth about accessibility is that it is time for us to stop being victims. (36)

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Harriet McBryde Johnson's YA novel *Accidents of Nature* offers readers of all ages space in which to rethink dramatically living dividedly as "us" and "them," and to feel their way to a new sense of disability culture and the relationships of "norms" and "crips." If you have time for only one book that will get you and the teens you love evolving into fair and open-minded thinking, go for this politicizing yet poetic novel.

Readers undergo the transformative experience of spending ten days at Camp Courage, a summer camp that helps them to a sense of disability culture and a look at the camp counselors and well-meaning yet heavy-footed camp administration. Friendship begins between two mature teens who use wheelchairs and have been supported by loving but very different families. Seventeen-year-old Jean, the narrator, is a telethon poster-child. She has always gone to regular school and has "normal" friends; her family treats her as if she is just like everyone else because they've never thought

there is another way to be. The much more critical, articulate and politically awake Sara, like her clever creator, has educated parents who make sure she draws strength from experiencing community with others in the disability culture. Like Sara, Johnson went to cross-disability camp until she was seventeen; she eventually practiced law and became a disability activist. The fictive girls help each other and the readers to see into each other's different lives and cultures, and along the way Sara leads Jean in co-hosting a reverse telethon skit that outrages the camp director, embarrasses guests, and bonds campers and readers solidly together:

> "And if you have a crippled child, have you ever thought, 'There, but for the grace of God, go I'? It's true. Normalcy can strike any family. You should light up these phone lines in celebration of your good fortune, and thank God for your crippled child! Right, Jean?" (Johnson 178-179)

Diversity advocate *and* novelist Johnson connects wonderfully with young readers who are dealing with a disability, along with their family members. They very much need to hear and see themselves in books. And she transforms the understanding of her many more non-disabled readers. NPR's Terry Gross does the same when she declares the film *Avatar* interesting in the way it shows "we're all limited by the things we can do and the things we can't do." Americans who watch that popular movie see our countrymen's limits arising out of our sense of what we can do in our might, ignoring the culture and values of differently formed "them." Reading books wakens us to other cultures. Disability literature reduces the way we limit other people by reminding us that we are all equally human.

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Bridging the Gap: The Necessity of Children's Literature

By Midori Hirai

CHILDREN REQUIRE LITERATURE; more than that, they require a literature that is all their own. It is a well-established fact that children's minds work differently than adults'—perhaps because they are not yet jaded by the world or because they do not have the number of experiences that color their interpretations. For that reason, more than any other, it is imperative that children's literature be a fundamental part of any child's life.

Children turn to literature for answers, for a way to understand the world around them. It is natural for them to answer questions by reading stories that provide a basis for understanding the past. What happens, then, when there are few stories available about an important part of history?

Yes, there are history books. Yes, there are teachers who can provide an answer to the questions children might have. However, when there is little written specifically for children about a historical event, there is not enough understanding of and connection to that event.

I spent most of my second grade year reading every single historical fiction book on the Holocaust I could get my hands on. I learned about the background of World War II, the discrimination, the fear, the concentration camps, and about the annihilating impact of prejudice against others for their race.

However, when I turned to look for literature on the Japanese American internment that same year in 1996, I found very few books on the subject. While there were a few books being published around that time, they simply weren't accessible enough because at that time, other than in the historic *Farewell to Manzanar,* the Japanese American internment wasn't considered a story for children to read. As a result, I spent my childhood knowing little about the internment that my grandparents suffered through and even less about the discrimination against Americans of Japanese descent that existed in America during the 1940s.

I gave this problem little mind until my third year in college, in 2009, when I was presented with the question of race in America and its effect on my family. Through the research I did into Executive Order 9066 and the repercussions of that decision, I came face-to-face for the first time with the reality that my grandparents had been sent to internment camps. I realized that the details of Japanese

Humanities Guide to Children's Literature: Jamie Ahlman, Editor • Lorna Hershinow, Copy Editor • Sherrie Dodo, Design

American internment, the human touches behind the facts and dates I memorized in high school, were missing.

The humanity of an event is found and catalogued best in the arts, specifically in the arts we can relate to and hold near to us. The arts allow us to interpret and humanize events, rather than merely memorize facts about them. Through literature and other art forms, we can better connect to the world as a whole.

I realized that I was a lesser person for not having read literature about Japanese American internment as a child. This injustice was a part of my family and national history, and I should be able to relate to and recognize the connection I had to the past.

Through my research, I realized that the main reason I had not read many books about Japanese American internment as a child was simply that not many existed. Several books came out in the mid-1990s, such as *The Moon Bridge* by Marcia Saven and *I Am An American* by Jerry Stanley, but many of them (including both of these titles) have now gone out of print. Once again, the gap I found in children's literature yawned wide open.

Luckily, new literature is slowly rising to fill this gap. Books that recount the stories of Japanese American internment such as *So Far From the Sea* by Eve Bunting have been published recently, which gives hope that this period of history will not be forgotten.

Children's literature is a unique genre in that difficult topics can be addressed in a simplified—but not necessarily simple—way. Stories of the most horrific injustices can be given to children with the intent that these stories provide a gentler introduction to the harsh realities of the world. It is imperative, then, to have a wide variety of children's literature covering an even wider range of topics. When there is a gap in the historical breadth available in children's literature, there are children who are missing out on learning about their cultural history.

Focused on what I'd discovered and hoping to making a difference, I decided to fill the gap I discovered by writing a novella for children based on my research into the Japanese American internment. I wanted to convey the human cost of what happened in a way that would reach a new generation of children who might not otherwise hear about the internment until much later. My goal was to recreate the types of stories I read about the Holocaust as a child, stories that drew me in and made me want to learn more about the subject. I wrote a story that looks at the connection between friends and the strain of the war through two characters: Rebecca, a young Jewish girl living in Los Angeles; and her best friend, Reiko, a young Japanese girl who is interned, despite being an eleven-year-old American citizen. I wanted to provoke questions and a conversation about the horrific injustices that happened in the 1940s.

Children's literature is most powerful in precisely its ability to inspire the children who read it. Through this literature that is all their own, children are inspired to learn, to connect, and to become a part of the world around them. Yes, all literature is important in its own right. However, children's literature inspires and changes the future.

Books on Japanese American Internment

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From "The Dangerous Alphabets of Edward Gorey"

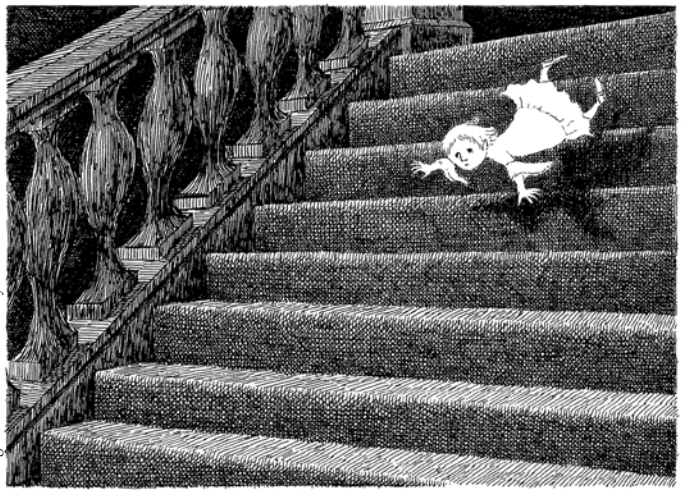
by Joseph Stanton

PICTURE-BOOK WRITER and artist Edward Gorey was remarkably inventive and was able to bring to bear his inventiveness to pursue a wide variety of genres and themes in which he took a delighted interest. His works can, somewhat paradoxically, be best appreciated as parodies of these genres and themes, but it also needs to be understood that the play of his parodies unfolds in special, multilayered ways. Gorey is commonly both making fun of a genre or a theme and having fun *with* it. He writes the sorts of things that interest him, but he plays with them. When, to name a few of his favorite forms, he writes a murder mystery, an alphabet book, or a collection of cautionary tales, he is both joking about the clichés of the genres and using those clichés in witty and enthusiastic ways. The playful nature of Gorey's practice is often enhanced by combining the various forms in surprising ways so that, for instance, he gives us an alphabet that is also a murder mystery in the *The Deadly Blotter*. The mission for Gorey is not primarily to laugh at mystery novels or alphabet books or cautionary tales. He does laugh at them in certain respects, but what he wants most to do is to enjoy the fun his elegantly off-kilter versions of these forms have to offer. Gorey's chosen genres and themes are beloved toys in the personal playground that is his picture-book art. A whimsically parodistic bent is the natural tendency of Gorey's mind, but his equally compelling inclination toward taking pleasure in the things

that attract his interest commonly puts his satirical skills into the service of bemusement rather than ridicule. Those of us who have become fans of Gorey find the combination of playfulness and obsession that we get in his work to be irresistible. Furthermore, it seems likely that Gorey's knack for the playful explains the popularity many of his works have with young people. The question of whether this or that book is suitable or unsuitable for children or teenagers is, for the most part, beside the point. His works earn their ample fan base of young people, as well as their cadre of adult adherents, mostly by means of how wickedly entertaining they consistently are.

Gorey delightfully warps the alphabet-book genre to various purposes–including the murder mystery, the cautionary tale, the animal book, and a variety of other less identifiable forms. The advantages of the alphabet-book genre to an author are considerable. One advantage is that such books provide arbitrary frameworks for collections of items or brief stories. Once the general nature of the alphabet has been selected, a pattern has been introduced that needs only to be pursued until a satisfactory set of items has been generated. The parallel nature of the things collected in the alphabet means that the writer will often be struck by ideas for other items while in the midst of finishing the already conceptualized things. Gorey clearly loved the way alphabetic structures enabled him to generate a 26-item set. The advantages of this structural strategy and the interesting challenges its formal limitations impose have made it a popular genre with writers and illustrators of books for children. The compositional attractiveness of the form is not the only reason for its proliferation, of course. In fact, the primary reason why alphabet books for children are published in great quantities is that they sell well to parents, teachers, and librarians. Such purchases stem from the assumption that repeated reiterations of the alphabet contribute significantly to the enhancement of children's reading and writing skills. Although sales volume never seems to have been a major concern for Gorey as he selected the topics and structures for his books, the popularity of his early alphabets undoubtedly reinforced his desire to do more. Gorey also enjoyed that the very fact that the notion of the alphabet book was itself a cliché meant that there was the considerable potential for surprise, even shock, when one produces alphabets of very unusual kinds. Gorey seemingly never tired of making the familiar genre of the ABC book into a vehicle for bizarrely avant-garde literary-visual performance.

I will provide, in what follows, accounts of several of Gorey's most distinctive alphabet books. Each of these can be found in one of the four "Amphigorey" collections of his work that have appeared over the years. Every library should have at least one set of these compendiums that provide access to the majority of Gorey's best known works. Several of the titles discussed below have also been brought back



A is for Amy who fell down the stairs

into print in their original single-book formats. . . .

The Gashlycrumb Tinies (from *Amphigorey*)

The Gashlycrumb Tinies is, by far, the most famous and admired of Gorey's alphabets. It could also be regarded as the most interesting test case in the consideration of whether his most characteristic books are suitable for children. As in *The Fatal Lozenge*, we have in this second published alphabet rhetoric suggestive of the cautionary tale; once again only some of the tales indicate that caution would have helped prevent the calamity. Some of these "tinies" did dangerous things and suffered the consequences, but others were victimized in random ways that would support Gorey's oft-expressed view that everyday life can be dangerous.

This alphabet is a poetic work. In this case, each alphabetical item is one line in length and ends in a word that rhymes with the ending word of the following or preceding item. This system of couplets gives the book a speed and simplicity that enhances the impact of each of its arresting pictures, as does the consistency of the approach in which each letter gives us the surprising death of a child. Each demise is unique and visually striking in some way. All the pictures are strong and some could be described as powerful, particularly the first two. For the letter A ("A is for Amy who fell down the stairs") there is the fall of pale Amy down beautifully crosshatched stairs that descend diagonally to fill the entirety of the picture. For the letter B ("B is for Basil assaulted by bears") the apprehensive face of Basil turns above his dark sailor-suit to regard the gigantic, furry forms of the bears that angle towards him from both sides. All lines of the remarkable poem that composes the text of this book are in iambic pentameter and the rhythm of the poem is handled with impeccable consistency.

The compelling simplicity, clarity, and sardonic wit of *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* account for its widespread popularity. Despite its killing off of twenty-six kids, it has proven to be an easy book for children to enjoy. The fact that this alphabet is consistent in its doling out of dire

fates, in that every single child character is killed off, would seem, in an odd sort of way, to make it less troublesome for arbiters of children's reading than *The Fatal Lozenge*, where a few particularly grim items stand out from the rest in their nightmarishness. That every single item in *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* has a child's downfall as its point makes for an evenhandedness that allows the overall light verse treatment to keep the emphasis on the wittiness of the work as a whole. Also, in this work we do not have full depictions of disturbing adult villains. In one picture we have the adult arms of a thug reaching out toward a child and in another we have the remains of the handiwork of an axe that was obviously wielded by an adult, but we are entirely spared in this book from the full-figured presence of adult evildoers. The emphasis remains entirely on the kids who have met the cruel fates.

In order to understand how Gorey is able to be so humorously grim, one has to disabuse oneself of the idea that Gorey is endeavoring to be spooky in a Halloween sort of way. From all accounts, he hated the word *macabre* and disliked the frequency with which it was used to describe his work. On many occasions he described the subject of his work as "everyday life," and he certainly felt that death is right around the corner for all of us. It also must be understood that children are the central personages in many of his works largely because Gorey identified with children in the respect that he saw them as exemplary of the vulnerability of humankind. A gifted only child in his youngest years, Gorey seems often to have been left to his own devices. Much of his work as a maker of original picture books seems to have grown out of his sense of the child's condition of helplessness. Where a child's experience can be considered as evident in Gorey's work it is important to note that he is not so much writing for children or about actual children as he is writing from the perspective of the child version of himself that he remained very much in touch with throughout his life. As with Maurice Sendak and many other of the best writers of children's picture books, Gorey creates his childlike material *as* a child, rather than *for* children.

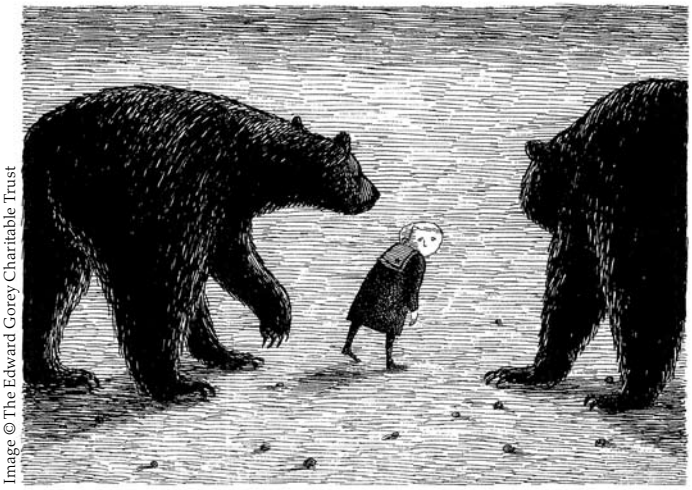


Image © The Edward Gorey Charitable Trust

B is for BASIL assaulted by bears

It is evident from the early stages of Gorey's work in the alphabet-book genre that he is aware of the potency of the paradox presented by writing an alphabet book with disturbing contents. *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* with its brief lines and absurdly disturbing demises catches the feel of a primer for the young while at the same time putting forward a catalog of dire events in a calmly factual manner. The expressionless tone adopted by Gorey here will be reiterated in many of his later books. Having been involved in the staging of satirical productions when he was a student at Harvard, Gorey well understood the comic strategy of the straight face.

Figbash Acrobate (from *Amphigorey Again*)

Figbash Acrobate is a uniquely Gorey production. Each letter is formed by acrobatically contorting the figure of Figbash–a long-armed and short-legged creature invented by Gorey to serve as a character in several of his books and plays. This creature slightly resembles the title character of *The Doubtful Guest*–possessing, as it does, the flat, beaky head also common to the characters in *The Unsung Harp* and a few other early works. Gorey stitched together many doll versions of Figbash, and this odd character seems to have been something of a personal symbol for Gorey. Gorey's balletic interests certainly come into play in *Figbash Acrobate* as Figbash is twisted and turned for alphabetic purposes. Figbash enthusiastically performs the twenty-six letters. Gorey also has Figbash shape himself as the numerals from zero through nine.

Concluding this consideration of Gorey's alphabet books with *Figbash Acrobate*, an entirely wordless book, can serve as a reminder that, though Gorey considered himself a writer first and an illustrator second, the visualization of his fancies was always at least half the story. Gorey's endless playing of the image against the word, the word against the image, enabled him to be creative and entertaining in ways that those who only write cannot come close to equaling. He is an exemplary figure in the world of picture-book art, and his relentless inventiveness makes him among the most valuable authors to share with students in language-arts classrooms where the teacher has an interest in stimulating students' literary and imaginative capabilities.

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