



St. Francis of Assisi

Elementary School - Sacramento, California

Visit us at www.stfranciselem.org

GUBBIO GAZETTE

January 27, 2010

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Elementary School is dedicated to living the Gospel values. Our Franciscan, academically challenging curriculum teaches and supports students in becoming contributing members of their communities.

St. Francis of Assisi

Schoolwide Learning Expectations

A St. Francis of Assisi Student is:

A) Spiritual *who*

- understands the Catholic faith
- demonstrates Gospel values
- actively participates in prayer celebrations
- shows a love of God, others, and self

B) Academic *who*

- actively solves problems and thinks critically
- makes progress through the diocesan standards
- develops and shares knowledge and talents
- demonstrates a curiosity and respect for learning

C) Respectful *who*

- appreciates diversity and the uniqueness of others
- practices good citizenship
- lives the "Acts of Courtesy"
- cares for God's creations

D) Confident *who*

- recognizes self-worth
- leads and cooperates
- embraces challenges
- always perseveres

E) Responsible *who*

- practices self-discipline
- makes Christ-like decisions
- owns his/her choices
- is trustworthy

Principal's Message

Dear St. Francis of Assisi Parents,

Catholic Schools Week begins Sunday, as we celebrate with all of the other Catholic schools in the nation. As you can see by the week-long schedule, St. Francis Elementary will be very busy! I look forward to seeing all of you at the many activities and events we have planned!

Our WASC Accreditation Team arrived today. They will be here through Friday evaluating our school. We look forward to working with them!

By now you should have received the letter in the mail about the extra days off in February. Because we will not be here for Ash Wednesday, we will have our school prayer service, with ashes, on Thursday, February 18th. All are welcome to join us.

Again, I look forward to seeing all of you throughout next week as we celebrate our Catholic school!

In the Peace of St. Francis of Assisi,

Mrs. Laurie Power

NEW STUDENT REGISTRATION

If you have another child who you would like to enroll at St. Francis Elementary for the fall, **NOW** is the time to do so. We are accepting applications for new students for the 2010-11 school year through February 19th. For more information, visit our website or call the school office.



St. Francis Elementary
School Calendar
January 2010

- 27-29 WASC Accreditation Team Visit
29 Noon Dismissal/WASC Accreditation
All K & TK will attend school 8:00 - 11:00 am
Art Show, 5:00 pm, Social Hall
31 Catholic Schools Week Kick Off
School Mass, 9:30 am, Church
Pancake Breakfast 8am-11am
Open House, 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Registration 2010 – 2011 Reminder

Registration for returning students and new entering siblings for the 2010 – 2011 school year will take place in March.

Registration Packets will be mailed to all families in February. Completed forms and fee payments are due in the office by March 11, 2010. New entering siblings may register in March, provided they have an application on file.

If your child **will not be returning** in the fall, Exit Notices are available in the office. Please notify the principal of your intentions by March 15, 2010. New students awaiting placement will be accepted following the deadline.

Registration forms are not available online. Please contact the Finance Office if you do not receive a packet by March 1st.

Religion Round-up

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

Psalm 27



Next week the Church celebrates Catholic Schools Week. We begin this Sunday with a Catholic Schools Week Mass at 9:30 a.m. Our school choir will be the music ministers, a school family will present the gifts, and school students will be proclaiming the readings and leading the intercessions. We will definitely be a presence for our parish.

Last Tuesday the sixth grade led our prayer service about Dr. Martin Luther King and social justice. As a special treat, they sang a beautiful song with three melodies. One was thanking God for our blessings, the second was asking God to guide us to peace, and the third was “We Shall Overcome”. At the end, all three melodies were sung simultaneously, weaving a rich musical tapestry. What a treat! St. Francis students are truly talented!

On Monday, our Third grade celebrated the perseverance of St. Paul. They reminded us that, like St. Paul, we must work hard and never give up, even when the road is difficult.

Next Monday our 7th grade will lead our Catholic Schools Week prayer service.

Tomorrow, January 28th, our school Mass will be led by the 4th grade. Our WASC Accreditation team will be in attendance. The gifts for Help Heal Haiti will be brought forward as our offering. Thank you to all who have contributed.

Congratulations to the Neal family who baptized their daughter Katie at the 9:30 Mass last week. Welcome to the faith, Katie!

Our schedule for the next few weeks is as follows:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Led by</u>	<u>Time</u>
Thurs Jan 28	4 th Mass	8:30 a.m.
Mon Feb 1	7 th Prayer Service	8:10 a.m.
Mon. Feb 8	1 st Prayer Service	8:10 a.m.
Thurs Feb 11	8 th Mass	8:30 a.m.
Thurs Feb 18	8 th Ash “Wednesday”	8:00 a.m.

Parents are always welcome to join us for prayer services and Masses.

Choir Notes

The annual Diocesan Choral Festival will take place on Friday February 12th at Christian Brothers H.S. Our very own school choir will be performing in the morning session, from 9:30 to 11:30. Mark your calendars!

Mr. Cain's Book Shelf

FICTION



[Following are five of the recently awarded 2010 American Library Association Literary Award Winners]

The John Newbery Award Medal for the Most Outstanding Contribution to children's literature:

When You Reach Me by **Rebecca Stead**
Reading level: Grade 5 – 8 / “Sixth-grader Miranda lives in 1978 New York City with her mother, and her life compass is Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. When she receives a series of enigmatic notes that claim to want to save her life, she comes to believe that they are from someone who knows the future. Miranda spends considerable time observing a raving vagrant who her mother calls the laughing man and trying to find the connection between the notes and her everyday life. Discerning readers will realize the ties between Miranda's mystery and L'Engle's plot, but will enjoy hints of fantasy and descriptions of middle school dynamics. Stead's novel is as much about character as story. Miranda's voice rings true with its faltering attempts at maturity and observation. The story builds slowly, emerging naturally from a sturdy premise. As Miranda reminisces, the time sequencing is somewhat challenging, but in an intriguing way. The setting is consistently strong. The stores and even the streets—in Miranda's neighborhood act as physical entities and impact the plot in tangible

ways. This unusual, thought-provoking mystery will appeal to several types of readers.”

The Randolph Caldecott Medal for the Most Distinguished American Book for Children:

The Lion & the Mouse by **Jerry Pinkney**
(This outstanding picture book with no words was reviewed in the October 14, 2009 Gubbio Gazette.)
“...Pinkney, who has created children's books for more than four decades, became the first individual African American illustrator to win the Caldecott medal since it was established in 1938...” (This quote is from the January 19, 2010 Sacramento Bee.)

The Randolph Caldecott Medal for the Most Distinguished American Book for Children (an Honor Book)

All the World by **Liz Garton Scanlon**
Reading level: Grade Kindergarten – 2 / “Charming illustrations and lyrical rhyming couplets speak volumes in celebration of the world and humankind, combining to create a lovely book that will be appreciated by a wide audience. The pictures, made with black Prismacolor pencil and watercolors, primarily follow a multicultural family from a summer morning on the beach through a busy day and night. A boy, his younger sister, and their parents experience a farmer's market, a lakeside pavilion, a soaking rain, a warm meal in a cozy café, a gathering of musical kin, and a quiet night at home. The hand-lettered text in dark gray is large and mobile as it moves readers along through the captivating vignettes. Other families are also depicted, and readers can follow many of their activities as they overlap and connect with the main characters. The folks in this small, diverse community experience what a summer day has to offer, including sun, wind, storm, and a sense of contentment and well-being. A double-page moon- and starlit illustration shows an overview of all the featured locales highlighted in this small slice of the world. Perfection.”

The Robert F. Sibert Medal for the Most Distinguished Informational Book For Children
(an Honor Book)

Claudette Colvin by **Philip Hoose**

Reading level: Grade 6 – Up / “On March 2, 1955, a slim, bespectacled teenager refused to give up her seat to a white woman on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Shouting “It’s my constitutional right!” as police dragged her off to jail, Claudette Colvin decided she’d had enough of the Jim Crow segregation laws that had angered and puzzled her since she was a young child. But instead of being celebrated, as Rosa Parks would be when she took the same stand nine months later, Claudette found herself shunned by many of her classmates and dismissed as an unfit role model by the black leaders of Montgomery. Undaunted, she put her life in danger a year later when she dared to challenge segregation yet again – as one of four plaintiffs in the landmark busing case *Browder v. Gayle*. Based on extensive interviews with Claudette Colvin and many others, Phillip Hoose presents the first in-depth account of a major, yet little-known, civil rights figure whose story provides a fresh perspective on the Montgomery bus protest of 1955 – 56. Historic figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks play important roles, but center stage belongs to the brave, bookish girl whose two acts of courage were to affect the course of American history.”

The Mildred L. Batchelder Award for an Outstanding Children’s Book
Translated from a foreign language and subsequently published in the United States

A Faraway Island by **Annika Thor**
(Originally published in Swedish in 1996 as “Eno o i havet.”)

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / “Torn from their homeland, two Jewish sisters find refuge in Sweden. It’s the summer of 1939. Two Jewish sisters from Vienna—12-year-old Stephanie Steiner and 8-year-old Nellie—are sent to Sweden to escape the Nazis. They expect to stay there six months, until their parents can

flee to Amsterdam; then all four will go to America. But as the world war intensifies, the girls remain, each with her own host family, on a rugged island off the western coast of Sweden. Nellie quickly settles in to her new surroundings. She’s happy with her foster family and soon favors the Swedish language over her native German. Not so for Stephanie, who finds it hard to adapt; she feels stranded at the end of the world, with a foster mother who’s as cold and unforgiving as the island itself. Her main worry, though, is her parents—and whether she will ever see them again.”

[The next five new books on this list were provided to our school by the Sacramento City School District.]

It’s Picture Day Today! By Megan McDonald

Reading level: Ages 4 – 8 / “For the first half, this one is pretty confounding. “Here come Buttons, followed by Feathers,” begins the text—and, sure enough, a bunch of buttons and feathers are twirling their way down a school hallway, soon to be joined by springs, rings, and “Wheely Things.” More and more seemingly random objects join the parade, all of them chattering their excitement about Picture Day. Unfortunately, a key player—Glue—is late, but when he (she? it?) shows up, everything comes together (literally). The book folds open to reveal a four-page-wide spread wherein all the various knickknacks have arranged themselves into an entire class of bizarre beings. It’s a payoff that will have many readers paging backward to find what parts of whom came from where. Though the palate seems a bit muted, Tillotson’s collage work, both creative and endearingly clunky, will awaken the inner cutter-and-paster in almost any young child. An ideal book to pair with a craft session.”

Look Out, Jeremy Bean! By Alice Schertle

Reading level: Grade 1 – 3 / “Three short stories introduce Jeremy Bean. He is frustrated because he can’t come up with a collection that no other kid has until his grandfather gives him inspiration. He tries to capture the elusive “dust bunnies” and ends up getting a real pet, and forgets to wear green on St. Patrick’s Day. Jeremy tries to do his best but sometimes his

best gets him into silly and not-so-silly situations, like being locked in the janitor's closet. Youngsters will empathize with the everyday occurrences in these funny, totally childlike tales. The black-and-white cartoon illustrations capture the flavor of the stories and feature a boy with wide eyes and freckles. A fine choice for beginning-chapter-book collections."

Pond Circle by Betsy Franco

Reading level: PreSchool-Grade 3—This straightforward depiction of the food chain focuses on a pond near the house of a little girl named Anna. The poetic text builds in a "This Is the House That Jack Built" fashion, starting with "the deep, still water" and then introducing "the jade green algae," "the mayfly nymph," "the diving beetle," "the loud bullfrog," and so on up the chain. In the early pages, death is quick and no-nonsense: fly, beetle, frog, and snake are easily devoured by larger predators. Once the furry animals appear, however, the author is more circumspect; the owl merely dives for the skunk, and the coyote stalks the raccoon. Above it all, Anna hears the howl of a coyote and looks out her window, subtly reinforcing humanity's place at the top of the hierarchy. Vitale's rich, colorful oil-on-wood illustrations are as poetic as the text in their depiction of the natural world. An appended "facts to pond-er" section offers more information about the animals included. A clear, child-friendly look at ecology, this book is destined to find a home in story times and classrooms."

Sergio Saves the Game! By Edel Rodriguez

Reading level: Ages 4 – 8 / "Sergio has big dreams of being a star soccer player. In reality, though, the young penguin often stumbles and falls running after the ball and does not attain the success he yearns to have. Then his mother suggests that he try playing goalie. The game against the big, bruising' Seagulls becomes his test of talent. Beginning soccer players will relate to Sergio's frustrations and admire his resolve. Rodriguez uses an attractive, yet simple palette of aqua, golden yellow, rust red, and penguin black, and the colors stand out sharply against the white background. Action is created with varying

perspectives on the ball flying at the lone goalie."

Song of Middle C by Alison McGhee

Reading level: Ages 4 – 8 / "A young musician describes the week leading up to her first piano recital: "Hoo boy, have I been practicing!" She has memorized her piece, "Dance of the Wood Elves," and plays it over and over, using her imagination to add to her "musical interpretation" (a humorous spread shows a woodland scene with the girl playing as elves cavort across the top of the piano). On the big day, she wears her lucky underwear and rehearses taking a bow in front of her stuffed animals. She's all confidence in the car even as her big brother taunts her, and remains "cool as a cucumber" backstage. But when it's her turn, she freezes up ("Fingers? Hello?"). Placing her hands in starting position, she accidentally puts her thumb on middle C and inspiration hits: she plays this note repeatedly—like thunder, like wind, and finally like "tiny wood elves who have lost their lucky underwear"—to the great surprise and admiration of the audience. Drawn with pen and ink and colored digitally, the cartoon artwork merrily depicts the action while illustrating the young maestro's funny flights of fancy. Sharp lines, clean layouts, and clever details add to the fun. The first-person narrative strikes just the right note, revealing feelings and concerns that will be familiar to any child who has ever been in a performance situation."

Bulldog Won't Budge by T.T. Sutherland
(One book in the *Pet Trouble* series)

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Eric can't wait to get a dog he can run around and play with, like his friend Parker's golden retriever. But Meatball the bulldog doesn't seem to be the run-around-and-play type ... Even when they go for a walk, Meatball sits down on the sidewalk! Can Eric get this stubborn bulldog to get up and go?"

Mud-Puddle Poodle by T.T. Sutherland
(Another book in the *Pet Trouble* series)

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Rosie loves everything to be pretty and organized, so when she's finally allowed to get her own dog, she

chooses an adorable, precious little poodle. But when it turns out her princess would rather get messy than sit on a fancy pillow, will Rosie be able to handle the mischievous pup?"

Runaway Retriever by T.T. Sutherland
(Yet one other book in the *Pet Trouble* series)
Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Parker hadn't considered getting a dog, but when playful Merlin, the golden retriever, comes into his life, Parker is thrilled. The two are inseparable from day one--because whenever Parker tries to leave, Merlin escapes his fence or cage and follows him! Can anything make this loveable dog sit and STAY?"

Fight for Life by Laurie Halse Anderson
(# 1 in the *Vet Volunteers* series)
Reading level: Grade 4 – 6 / "...This...is...a spin-off of the popular American Girl stories, feature[ing] 11-year-old Maggie, who has been raised by her grandmother since her parents were killed in a car accident. Gran is a veterinarian who owns the Wild at Heart Animal Clinic, where Maggie is a volunteer. The plot centers on a crisis involving 10 sick puppies brought to Gran's clinic. Maggie suspects that they all came from the same place--a puppy mill. With the help of other teen volunteers at the clinic, she sets out to find the person who's behind the mill and shut it down. Maggie's first-person narrative describes the veterinary procedures in simple language and builds suspense in the key adventure scenes. But it is Maggie's portrayal of her grandmother as a feisty, capable vet that will stick in readers' minds. The other teen volunteers introduced in this story each get a turn to shine in upcoming books in the series."

Say Goodbye by Laurie Halse Anderson
(# 5 in the *Vet Volunteers* series)
Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Yum-Yum is an adorable shih tzu and one of Zoe's favorite clients. When Zoe and Yum-Yum visit a ward of cancer patients, she is amazed by how much joy the tiny dog can spread in an instant. But then Yum-Yum is diagnosed with cancer himself. How can Zoe help the little dog pull through?"

Teacher's Pet by Laurie Halse Anderson

(# 7 in the *Vet Volunteers* series)
Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Maggie's still getting used to middle school. One of her teachers is, too—Mr. Carlson, her new science teacher, is blind, and is working with a guide dog for the first time. Scout is a love of a German shepherd and really wants to do his job, but Maggie can tell that Mr. Carlson's still having a hard time. Maybe she can help."

Agnes Parker...Keeping Cool in Middle School by Kathleen O'Dell
Reading level: Grade 4 – 7 / "Agnes Parker knows that she wants to fly under the radar during her first year at Horace Mann Middle School—at least until she knows what the rules are. Her best friend, Prejean, prefers to make a statement. She announces that she's going to run for class president in order to do something about the taunting behavior of the eighth-grade boys. Agnes will be her manager. Complications ensue when Prejean is invited to be a part of the track team, leaving Agnes to fend for herself on the metro bus where the bullying continues. Then she teams up with Aram Keshishian to clean the art room after school. Prejean's father has moved out; consequently, the girl develops an ulcer. Adults are portrayed as a positive support network and student interaction is very believable. Only the school administration comes off badly, albeit realistically. There are enough plausible plot complications to create and sustain interest for the intended audience. Wholesome seems such an old-fashioned word, but it perfectly describes the book. O'Dell addresses trust, loyalty, respect, and love with the kindness and humor found in the work of those authors who've become staples with middle-grade readers."

Blue Mountain Trouble by Martin Mordecai
Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "First-time author Mordecai, a native Jamaican, brings the Blue Mountain region of his homeland to life in a unique coming-of-age story tinged with mystery. Next year, twins Pollyread and Jackson Gilmore will be moving to town to live with their aunt and attend secondary school. But for the time being, they are focusing on

strange occurrences in their mountain village of Top Valley. Periodic sightings of a phantom goat that seems to act as their protector are unnerving, but more disturbing is the return of Jammy, a villager who has spent time in prison and has now taken root on the Gilmore's land. Through colorful narrative punctuated with regional colloquialisms and poetic language ("When you sleep your whole life under open windows in a place so quiet you can feel the night sky move, then rain when it wakes you is like God telling you stories"), the author captures the rhythm of the children's daily life and effectively conveys their hopes, fears and family love as they look toward the future and learn secrets about the past."

Dolphin Song by Lauren St. John

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Martine is just getting used to her new life on the game reserve with her grandmother and the white giraffe, Jemmy, when she must go away. Her class is going on a trip—an ocean voyage to watch the sardine run, a spectacular natural phenomenon off the coast of South Africa. But the exciting adventure takes a dramatic turn when Martine and several of her classmates are thrown overboard into shark-infested waters! They are saved by a pod of dolphins and end up marooned on a deserted island. Now the castaways must learn to work together, not only to survive but to help the dolphins who are now in peril."

The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School by Candace Fleming

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "The fourth graders at Aesop Elementary are, well, unusual. There's Calvin Tallywong, who wants to go back to kindergarten. But when he actually gets the chance, he's forced to do the squirrel dance and wear a yellow-school-bus name tag. The moral of his story? Be careful what you wish for. Then there's Amisha Spelwadi, who can spell *wildebeest*, no problem. She's sure she'll get 100 percent on her spelling test. But when the teacher, Mr. Jupiter, asks the class to spell *cat*, all Amisha can come up with is *kat*. The moral this time? Don't count your chickens before they hatch. Here's a collection of contemporary fables about a hilariously rambunctious group of kids

and their amazing teacher that is sure to delight students and teachers alike!"

Go Big or Go Home by Will Hobbs

Reading level: Grade 5 – 8 / "When a meteorite crashes through the roof of Brady's home in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the young astrophile is excited beyond belief. He names it Fred (for "Far Roaming Earth Diver") and calls his cousin Quinn over to check it out. The two are enamored of anything extreme or insane and deem this space rock "extremely insane" before setting out for a headlong series of bicycling, fishing, and caving adventures. When Brady starts to surpass his normal physical limitations, it becomes apparent that the meteorite might have brought along some hidden visitors with it from outer space. Hobbs captures young teen dialogue well, and the characters are all easy to like in this solid adventure. Reluctant readers who'd rather be airborne than chair bound will appreciate the two young boys' penchant for pushing the envelope, and the postulations involving extremophile organisms is a neat twist with just a hint of science behind it, even if it leads to a few mildly preposterous situations by the end."

Hattie Big Sky by Kirby Larson

Reading level: Grade 7 and up / "In this engaging historical novel set in 1918, 16-year-old orphan Hattie Brooks leaves Iowa and travels to a Montana homestead inherited from her uncle. In the beautiful but harsh setting, she has less than a year to fence and cultivate the land in order to keep it. Neighbors who welcome Hattie help heal the hurt she has suffered from years of feeling unwanted. Chapters open with short articles that Hattie writes for an Iowa newspaper or her lively letters to a friend and possible beau who is in the military in France. The authentic first-person narrative, full of hope and anxiety, effectively portrays Hattie's struggles as a young woman with limited options, a homesteader facing terrible odds, and a loyal citizen confused about the war and the local anti-German bias that endangers her new friends. Larson, whose great-grandmother homesteaded alone in Montana, read dozens of homesteaders' journals and based scenes in the book on real events. Writing in figurative

language that draws on nature and domestic detail to infuse her story with the sounds, smells, and sights of the prairie, she creates a richly textured novel full of memorable characters.”

Home of the Brave Katherine Applegate
Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / “Kek, a young Sudanese refugee, is haunted by guilt that he survived. He saw his father and brother killed, and he left his mother behind when he joined his aunt's family in Minnesota. In fast, spare free verse, this debut novel by nonfiction writer Applegate gets across the immigrant child's dislocation and loss as he steps off the plane in the snow. He does make silly mistakes, as when he puts his aunt's dishes in the washing machine. But he gets a job caring for an elderly widow's cow that reminds him of his father's herds, and he helps his cousin, who lost a hand in the fighting. He finds kindness in his fifth-grade ESL class, and also racism, and he is astonished at the diversity. The boy's first-person narrative is immediately accessible. Like Hanna Jansen's *Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You* (2006), the focus on one child gets behind those news images of streaming refugees far away.”

Jack Ransom and the Skull King's Shadow
by James Rollins
Reading level: Grade 5 – 8 / “Rollins, a best-selling author of adult adventure, takes on the youth market with mostly good results, including a strong opener: a package from a Mayan archaeology site is lost (along with its sender) in quicksand, but it is only a decoy. Jake Ransom and his older sister receive the matching halves of a gold coin, an artifact that eventually fires them into a strange land where tribes of lost civilizations live side-by-side with prehistoric animals. In premise, this is very Harry Potter—Jake, a virtual orphan (his archaeologist parents have disappeared), has the fate of many resting on his skinny shoulders as he tries to fight a Voldemort-like specter, who has inspired traitors to his side. Stylistically, however, Rollins is no Rowling, though his short paragraphs and staccato sentences make this a fine read for the reluctant or those who put a premium on action. Oddly, things get a bit more ho-hum as

they become more fantastical, but those left wondering what's next will apparently have many sequel opportunities to find out. The intensive media campaign will no doubt promote demand.”

Lawn Boy by Gary Paulsen
Reading level: Grade 4 – 7 / “This short and hilarious tale pitches an ordinary preteen with an old riding lawn mower into a dizzying ascent up the financial ladder. His sights set no higher than a new inner tube for his bike, the young narrator is thrilled to make \$60 in one day, mowing his neighbors' lawns. Just as demand for his services skyrockets, he meets Arnold, an honest, home-based stockbroker who becomes his business manager . . . and less than a month later, the lad has a dozen migrant laborers in his employ. The legality of these workers is left vague, but their young employer treats them fairly, and the thousands of dollars he earns goes into some wildly successful investments—including sponsorship of a rising prizefighter whose help comes in handy when the burgeoning enterprise attracts a shakedown artist. Thanks to quick lessons in, to quote some of the chapter heads, “Capital Growth Coupled with the Principles of Product Expansion” and “Force of Arms and Its Application to Business,” the young tycoon ends up smarter than when he started out, and worth half a million dollars. When it comes to telling funny stories about boys, no one surpasses Paulsen, and here he is in top form.”

The Learning Dog by K.A. Nuzum
Reading level: Grade 4 – 7 / “Dessa Dean, 11, was a powerless witness as her diabetic mother froze to death when they were caught in an early-winter storm. Since then, she and her father have gone through the motions of normalcy, with him going out daily to check the traps while she stays behind to do the schoolwork he prepares and to fix their meager dinner. But things are not normal: Dessa Dean frequently relives the horror of her mother's death, and she is unable to make herself venture beyond the steps of their isolated Colorado cabin. The week before Christmas, though, an injured dog comes sniffing around. Dessa Dean's initial attempts to befriend it fail: the jittery animal has apparently been abused

and keeps her distance. Repeated efforts pay off, but even when the dog allows Dessa Dean to approach her, she remains on edge around the girl's father. As another storm nears, he is having no success with his hunting forays and has little patience for a dog that will only stay inside when the door is open to the frigid air. Dessa Dean is caught between her growing feelings for the animal and her father's concern over their basic survival. This story of an agoraphobic girl and a claustrophobic dog and how they slowly move one another toward hope could have been maudlin, but Nuzum's pacing and spare, poetic narrative create something quite wonderful. The novel will draw comparisons to Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* (Candlewick, 2000), but it is certainly not a *Winn-Dixie* wannabe. This is a beautiful story in which friendship and the power of being needed trump despair."

Magic Pickle by Scott Morse

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "What would you do if the world's greatest superhero lived under your floorboards? What would you do if said superhero was a pickle?! When Weapon Koshier, the Magic Pickle, erupts from the bedroom floor of little Jo Jo Wigman, she has to answer those questions and more! What's the Magic Pickle's connection to the Brotherhood of Evil Produce? Just what is "Dill Justice"? How did Danny Johnson get to be so cute? Find out all the answers in this sweet and savory collection of Magic Pickle adventures!"

The Magic Thief by Sarah Prineas

Reading level: Grade 3 – 6 / "Conn, a pickpocket on the streets of Twilight, one day picks the pocket of a powerful wizard and steals his locus magicalicus, the center of his power. It should kill Conn, but it doesn't. Nevery, the wizard, has just returned after a 22-year exile, to try to save the town from the leaching of its magic, upon which so much, including its economy, depends. Curious about the boy, Nevery takes him on as an assistant and then an apprentice. Although it is the wizard's job to stem the tide of the disappearing magic, he seems unable to do so. Conn believes he knows the answer, but his enemies are closing in. Prineas has created an

appealing cast of characters, which she carefully reveals through their actions. The story is told primarily by Conn, and is interspersed with cryptic journal entries by Nevery, which offer a tantalizing counterpoint to the protagonist's viewpoint. Their voices are consistent and well handled. Exciting without being frantic, the narrative wastes no time getting to the heart of the story. This novel would work well as a read-aloud, as it has a conversational rhythm that moves the plot along. The book is long, but the large print and appealing drawings will encourage younger readers. Fantasy and adventure lovers alike will groan when they get to the tantalizingly mischievous ending, and are likely to hound you until the sequel arrives."

Monster Squad, The Slime That Would Not Die by Laura Dower

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Jesse Ranger was just an average kid with an obsession for Oswald Leery's B-Monster movies until he discovered a dangerous secret. It turns out Leery's special filming process brought his movie monsters to life and now they've escaped the screen! Something must be done, so Leery recruits Jesse, Stella, Damon, and Lindsey to help. But how do you trap a B-Monster, especially one made up of slime?"

The Postcard by Tony Abbott

Reading level: Grade 6 – 9 / "Abbott, author of *Firegirl* (2007) and the Droon series, sets no easy task for himself with this book, which contains a mystery within a mystery. Thirteen-year-old Jason is heading to St. Petersburg to help clean out the house of a deceased grandmother whom he's never met. As soon as he arrives, mystery meets him. Who are those odd people at the funeral? And what about the strange phone call that leads him to a tinted postcard of a Florida landmark about to be demolished? The postcard points Jason to several old manuscripts that tell the story of his grandparents' romance. Or do they? Abbott plays with style as he alternates between the contemporary mystery of finding the manuscripts with the manuscripts themselves, written in a hard-boiled detective style. The result is sometimes too convoluted, but the book is so enticing that readers will go along

even when the going is rough. Jason (paired nicely with a neighbor girl as sidekick) is a hero worth rooting for. Kudos, too, to the book's designer, whose use of old postcards heightens the appeal."

Rissa Bartholomew's Declaration of Independence by Lynda B. Comerford

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "Rissa Bartholomew didn't plan on declaring her independence from all of her friends at her own birthday party, one week before the start of middle school. But somehow, that's exactly what she did. Now she's entering sixth grade without a single friend, and she's determined to make new ones without simply following the herd."

The Soldiers of Halla by D.J. MacHale
(Book Ten in the *Pendragon* series)

Reading level: Ages 9 – 12 / "*It has all been leading to this.* Every victory. Every loss. All the thrills and sadness; the hope and despair. Bobby Pendragon's heart-pounding journey through time and space has brought him to this epic moment. He and his fellow Travelers must join forces for one last desperate battle against Saint Dane. At stake is not only the tenth and final territory, but all that ever was or will be. Everywhere. This is the war for Halla. Every question is answered. Every truth is revealed. The final battle has begun."

Yellow Bird and Me by Joyce Hansen

Reading level: Grade 5 – 8 / "Hansen's familiarity with reading problems and young people is evident in her credible characters and lively dialogue that rings true. Doris, a black sixth grader, loses her best friend, Amir, when his foster parents place him in a group home. Missing her friend, Doris is absorbed in writing letters and a poem to Amir and in plotting ways to earn money to pay him a visit. Nothing is working out for her, though, as her friends tease her, her new teacher Mrs. Barker is mean, her parents won't let her keep her job at the beauty parlor, and crazy Yellow Bird keeps pestering her to help him with his reading problem. When Amir writes back, he tells Doris not to come yet and to take care of Bird. Reluctantly, Doris discovers that despite his problem, Bird is smart and a good friend. Bird's

difficulties are too big for Doris to handle by herself, and with the help of the new drama club teacher, Bird gets the lead in the play. There are surprises for both Bird and Doris at the end of the story, and a final letter to Amir shows that Doris has learned how to become her own "Amir." The vibrant inner-city setting and Bird's charm make this a pleasant read."