

RISE

A Children's Literacy Journal
Reading Inspires Success in Education

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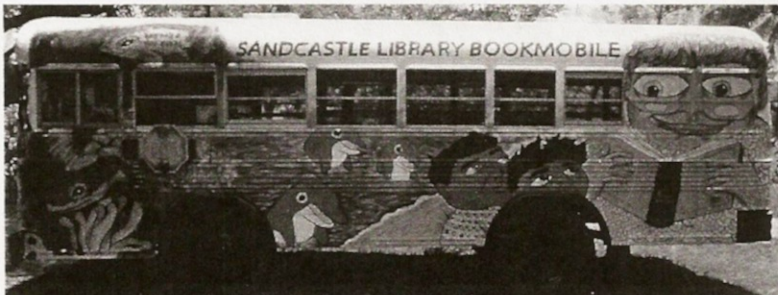
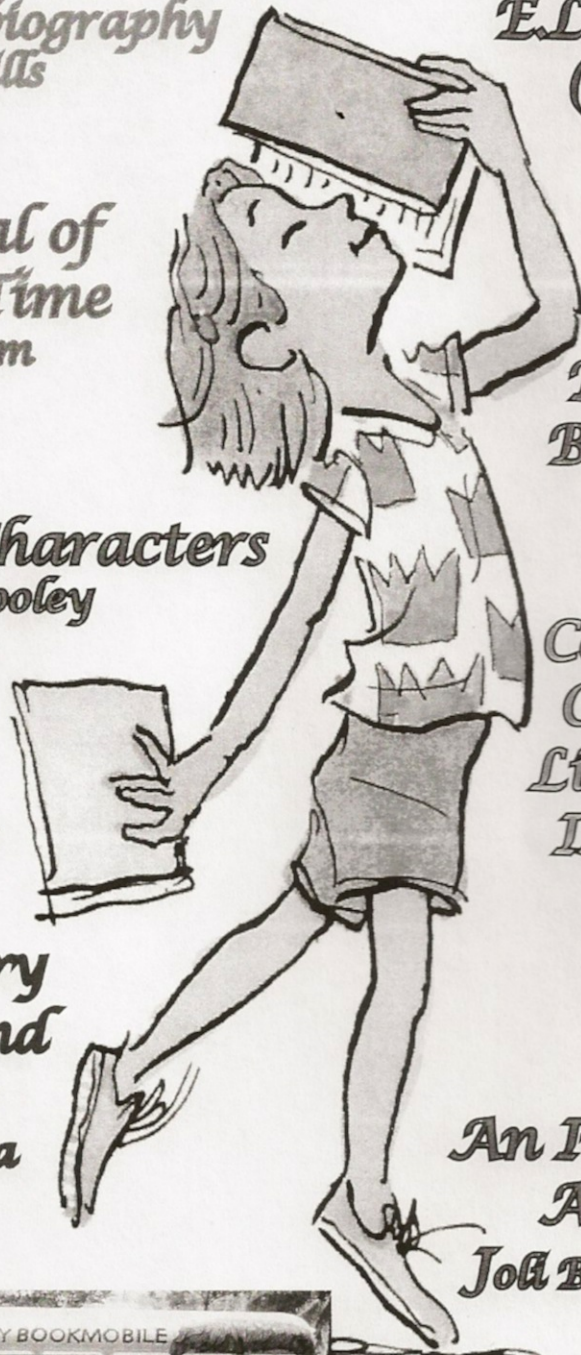
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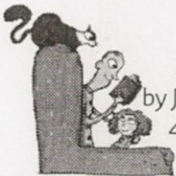
Simplicity has never been more beautiful, in subject or image. Staake conveys the boy's essential loneliness simply by drawing his eyes as downcast, setting him apart from his boisterous schoolmates as he does what he must: copes with lessons and walks home alone through the city. But this day is different. A tiny bluebird follows him. Their friendship develops. They play. The boy is happy. His eyes are wide open.

Moving our eyes, turning the pages, we are in Staake's control. The squares and rectangles telling each moment are sometimes large, sometimes small, sometimes arrayed like banners across the top of the pages, but always with a rhythm that tells the story. At the very center of the book is the only whole page illustration: the boy's happy face and the bluebird on his shoulder. As the story moves toward its ending, the pages begin to darken and the images become jagged, then quieter again as we see what sadness looks like. But Staake keeps the ending deliberately ambiguous: colors and shapes take beautiful flight, whatever we want them to mean.

Staake has said it took him 10 years to complete *Bluebird*. Fortunately his publishers have honored every detail of it, from cover to endpapers to dust jacket and everything in between. And Staake has dedicated it to John James Audubon—who would be pleased.

Review by Lucy Rollin

Year of the Jungle: Memories from the Home Front



by Suzanne Collins. Illustrated by James Proimos. ISBN 978-0-545-42516-2. Scholastic, 2013.

If this author's name looks familiar it is because of the popularity of her dystopian young adult trilogy, *The Hunger Games*. This year, Suzanne Collins and illustrator James Proimos have crafted a

poignant picture book about the confusion and anxiety experienced by a little girl named Suzy when her father is sent to fight a war in the jungles of Viet Nam.

Based on her personal experiences, Collins frames this war story with the comforts of family and home. It begins and ends with Suzy sitting in a chair with her father reading Ogden Nash. While confronting the fear and confusion Suzy feels when the adults around her won't tell her what is going on when her father leaves or when he is coming back, the book appropriately distances young readers from graphic violence or trauma.

The cartoon illustrations, Suzy's humorous relationship with her cat, and the back and forth between Suzy imagining what it is like in the jungle in Viet Nam to her daily life at home provide plenty of space for young readers to sympathize with Suzy without having to face the same fears her father does while at war. The book has a comforting, yet realistic, ending because even though her father returns from Viet Nam unscathed, Suzy acknowledges that sometimes "He stares into space. He is here but not here."



This is an excellent book for any child who has loved ones in the armed forces or who is interested in learning about war. It provides a useful introduction to topics associated with war and a relatable, comforting character for young people who worry about their loved ones serving overseas or suffering with PTSD.

Review by Sarah Minslow

The Mighty Lalouche

by Matthew Olshan. Illustrated by Sophie Blackall. ISBN 978-0-375-86225-0. Random House 2013.

"Never Underestimate A Man Who Loves His Finch"

Malcolm Gladwell's *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (2013) challenges the ways we often perceive advantages and disadvantages. Through a

series of counterintuitive examples, Gladwell argues that individuals considered the underdog can frequently use this status to their advantage and triumph by cunning and surprise. Gladwell shows what happens when ordinary people confront giants and observes that what are often considered to be disadvantages are actually advantages.



The Mighty Lalouche is a clever picture book that confirms Gladwell's thesis in that it is story of a humble Parisian postman who loses his job and becomes a boxer to support himself and his pet finch, Genevieve. While Lalouche is small and rather bony, Olshan mentions that his hands were nimble, his legs were fast, and his arms were strong. When Lalouche confronts a series larger and more seasoned boxers in the ring, they laugh at his puny size, but are unprepared when the humble postman shows himself to be an able opponent. Olshan wrote *The Mighty Lalouche* for Sophie Blackall after learning that the Brooklyn-based Australian artist collected photographs of nineteenth century French boxers, especially those featuring elegant mustaches, such as the Mighty Lalouche. The author's note at the end of the story explains that La boxe francasie, or French boxing, was a popular sport in late nineteenth century that allowed fighters to use their feet as well as their fists, so that it resembled contemporary kickboxing. Consequently French boxing favored speed and agility over brute force. It was possible a smaller, but quick boxer, like Lolouche, could triumph over opponents like the humorously named Ampere who used shock tactics, the Piston who pounds his adversaries into submission, and the Grecque who ties boxers into a bow. The endpapers provide posters announcing other fanciful Parisian boxers, such as the Pointillist and Misanthrope whose skills include "surliness, disdain, and caustic wit."

Lolouche must finally confront the

Anaconda, a huge muscleman who squeezes boxers until they pop. With his battle cry of "For country, mail and Genevieve," Lalouche uses his skills honed as a mailman to outwit his massive opponent. When he is offered his old position at the post office, Lalouche retires from the ring to resume his quiet, but satisfying life, of gazing at the Seine from his small apartment with his finch.



Blackall's witty illustrations are the chief pleasure of the book. Using the Japanese technique of tatebanko or paper dioramas, her colorful illustrations have a three-dimensional quality and add whimsy, but slightly subversive, tone to the story. Blackall won the Ezra Jack Keats Award for

her illustrations to Shirin Yim's *Ruby's Wish* in 2003 and her illustration to Rukhsana Kahn's *Big Red Lollipop* were selected in 2010 as one of the New York Times Top Ten Picture Books. Children will enjoy her humorous illustrations of Lolouche's struggles in the boxing ring. Adults who are familiar with Blackall's artwork from *Missed Connections: Love, Lost & Found* (2011) in which she created bittersweet images inspired from the submitted posts of the *lovelorn to Craigslist* will find much sly humor and irony in her charming illustrations.

Review by Jan Susina

Handbook for Dragon Slayers

by Merrie Haskell. ISBN 978-0-06-200816-9. Harper Collins, 2013

Handbook for Dragon Slayers is an adventurous middle-grade fantasy. It's set in this world, so to speak: an alternate medieval land somewhere along the Rhine, but with dragons that actually exist.

