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WOW REVIEW

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VOLUME VII, ISSUE 2

Winter 2014

Humor in Children's Books

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WOW Review: Volume VII, Issue 2
Winter 2014
Humor in Children's Books

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Introduction and Editors' Note

This issue of WOW Review is a themed issue focusing on books that draw on the many sources of humor as indicated in this quote:

Humor takes many shapes and forms. It can be as sharp as a surgeon's knife or as gentle as a touch of silk. It can convey uncomfortable truths, point up life's absurdities, challenge the imagination, take us by surprise, release us from fears and anxieties. And while it is true we don't all agree about what's funny, it's also true that every one of us finds pleasure in some sort of humorous literature. (Mallen, 1993, p. 83, retrieved from files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED362905.pdf)

The books reviewed for this issue reflect these many shapes and forms and speak to the universality of humor in helping us to be more aware of both the realities around us and the world of fantasy. *The Cat, the Dog, Little Red, the Exploding Eggs, the Wolf and Grandma; The Story Starts Here!*; and *The Big Bad Wolf and Me* take advantage of the universal understandings of fairy tales, twisted into scenarios that modernize characters, events, and perspectives. In this case, the child perspective is key to the resulting humor within these stories. This book just ate my dog! reveals an absurd story that cleverly engages the reader in the dilemma faced by the protagonist.

Hello, Mr. Hulot and *Tap Dancing on the Roof* are seemingly very different texts as *Hello, Mr. Hulot* recreates a famous 1940's and 1950's film character from France, and *Tap Dancing on the Roof* provides excellent examples of the poetic form, sijo. However, what these two have in common is asking the reader to examine everyday life for incidents and items that might take on new insights and appreciation through a humorous stance. *Mr. Hulot* has distinct quirky characteristics that come to life in his daily interactions within his community while *Tap Dancing on the Roof* invites readers to examine closely and in humorous ways the often taken-for-granted details that surround them.

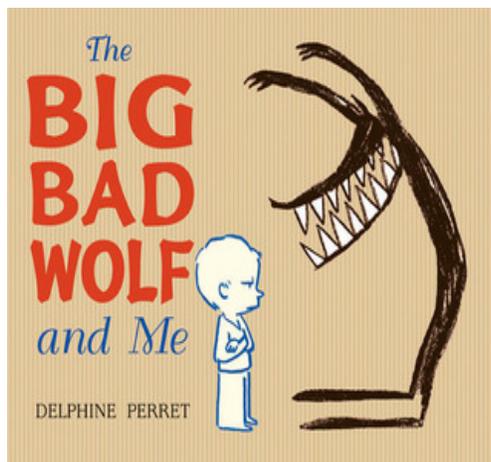
The Chickens Build a Wall conveys, in a story filled with irony, uncomfortable truths of prejudice and ungrounded fear—readers can chuckle as they read but are left with serious and significant after thoughts. *Norman, Speak!* reminds readers that joy and companionship are possible even when the ability to understand is limited. However, the humor here is a serious reminder of the need to understand those with whom we have trouble communicating. *Manyunya* provides universal characteristics and insights about a family that can prove humorous for all as readers make personal connections to their own life experiences. And, *When Mr. Dog Bites* gives readers powerful insights to a young man with Tourettes Syndrome whose approach to his disability provides humorous moments that relieve tension and informs the reader in an authentic, understanding frame.

Our hope is that these reviews will invite you into the pleasure of their humor, whether this pleasure challenges your imagination, surprises your expectations, or beckons you to new insights.

Janelle Mathis, Editor



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The Big Bad Wolf and Me

Written and Illustrated by Delphine Perret

Translated by Shannon Rowan

Sterling, 2006, 64 pp.

ISBN: 978-1402737251

A young boy is on his way home from school when he sees an animal that he assumes is a dog. After attempting to speak to the animal with a few phrases, such as “good doggy,” the slouching creature announces he is a wolf—The Big Bad Wolf. However, the wolf believes that no one is

afraid of him anymore and his confidence is obviously gone. Thus begins the story of helping a depressed talking wolf return to his scary personality. The wolf is invited to live in the boy’s closet as they read stories about the wolf, eat chocolate chip cookies, watch television, and practice scary appearances and sounds.

Humor is found in both the text and in the illustrations, as both use realistic simplicity to develop this imaginary tale. The penciled cartoon-like images with dialogue captions develop the story in 12 brief chapters, narrated by the boy. Each page renders 3-4 scenes that share humorous insights into this unlikely developing friendship. Created with slight lines of blue for the boy and brown for the wolf, the cream colored background provides open space for readers to focus and acknowledge the humorous images of the story. Subtle humor lies in the dialogue as it reflects innocent questions and efforts on the part of the boy to revive the wolf’s spirit while the wolf tries to regain his dignity by cooperating with the boy. The end pages reflect the success of the duo with the opening end-page revealing an image of the boy roaring at the shaken wolf while the final end-page image shows a newly confident wolf scaring the boy with a roar.

Delphine Perret is a French author/illustrator for children who, prior to *The Big Bad Wolf and Me*, published six other books in France and has continued her work to include in 2013, a sequel, *The Big Bad Wolf Goes on Vacation*. In the sequel, Perret continues the wolf’s story with similar art and dialogue as the wolf decides to accompany the boy and his grandfather on vacation. Perret’s artistic beginnings were at the École des arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg where she graduated in 2003. She is inspired by everyday occurrences in creating her books. More information can be found about Perret at her website (<http://www.chezdelphine.net/>).

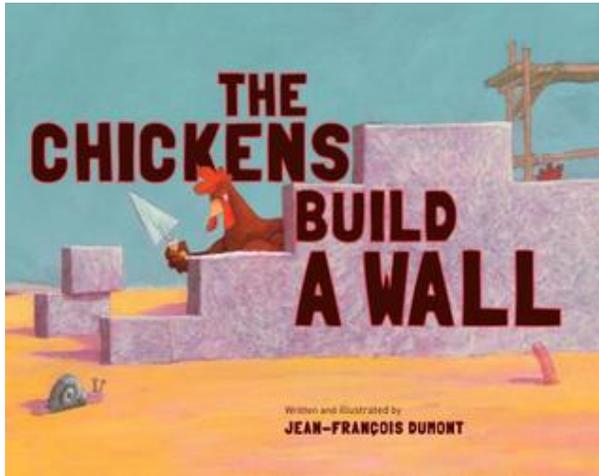
Other books to pair with this one, besides its sequel, might be *The Cat, the Dog, Little Red, the Exploding Eggs, the Wolf and Grandma* (Diane and Christyan Fox, 2014) or *The Story Starts Here!* (Caroline Merola, 2014), both reviewed in this issue of WOW Review. Other titles that can make up an enjoyable text set on wolves with a contemporary flair are included in the reviews of these two books.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas

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The Chickens Build a Wall

Written and illustrated by Jean François Dumont
Eerdmans, 2013, 33 pp.
ISBN: 978-0802854223

The Chickens Build a Wall, was originally published in France as *Une poule Derriere un Mur* in 2011, and translated into English in 2013. The book is on the 2014 USBBY award list and the 2014 Notable Books for a Global Society award list. The author and illustrator, Jean François Dumont, was born in Paris in 1959 and studied architecture in

college although he later devoted himself to the art of drawing. Dumont illustrated numerous books in his native France prior to both writing and illustrating several of his own books for children that include *A Blue So Blue* (2003), which won the 2004 Prix Saint-Exupéry award given annually to the best illustrated picture book in France and *The Geese March in Step* (2014) and *The Sheep Go on Strike* (2014).

The book centers on a group of chickens who over react when another creature, a hedgehog, appears in their farm yard. The chickens have never seen a hedgehog before and decide that for their own protection they need to build a wall around the farmyard to keep the stranger out. The chickens work all winter to build a wall only to find that their intent to keep strangers out did not go as planned and the hedgehog has mistakenly been inside the wall the entire time. Sly humor resides both in the text and illustration as the irony of their paranoia and mistrust is brought to life in their realistic intent. The story invites readers to step back and smile at human error while contemplating the underlying cause and deeper significance of their actions.

The language and short sentences of this story make the book easy to use for multiple age groups. Dumont's acrylic illustrations appear simplistic but imply an energy within the pop-eyed chickens that keeps the story moving. Their seriously intended actions appear silly as the hedgehog is still and quiet. Emotions are clearly created as readers can sense anger, fear, and determination. The illustrations also work to set a time frame as the seasons change against neutral colored backgrounds while the chickens continue to work.

Children from pre-school through early elementary will enjoy the story and illustrations, while the story can be used for older students as a means to broach discussions on a variety of social issues. This allegorical story has numerous themes ripe for discussion such as: problems that come about by making hasty judgments, blaming strangers for both real and imagined offenses, being different, immigration, treatment of strangers, group mentality, and fear of the unknown.

When considering the theme of immigration, several books that could be paired with this book are: *Migrant* (2011) written by Maxine Trottier, and illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault;

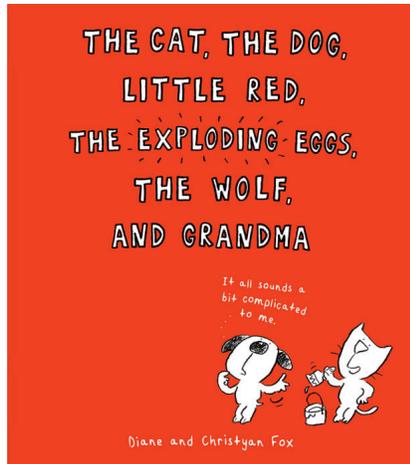
Hannah is My Name (2004) written and illustrated by Belle Yang; *I am René, the Boy* (2005) written by René Colato Lainez and illustrated by Fabiola Graullera Ramirez. Along the same theme, but for older students, *The Chickens Build a Wall* could be paired with *La Linea* (2008) by Ann Jaramillo as an introduction to the many forms of borders that keep others out. Book pairings around other themes, such as trying to fit in, could include *Sneetches* (1961) by Dr. Seuss.

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University, Illinois

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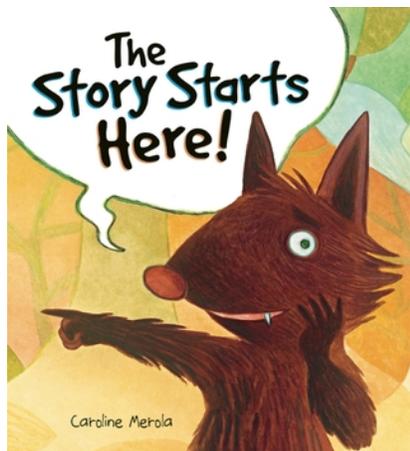


The Cat, the Dog, Little Red, the Exploding Eggs, the Wolf and Grandma

Written and Illustrated by Diane and Christyan Fox

Scholastic, 2014, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-0545694810



The Story Starts Here!

Written and Illustrated by Caroline Merola

Owl Kids, 2014, 36 pp.

ISBN: 978-1771470797

Humor can be sly and subversive, based on the reader's awareness that certain traditional elements of a book or a well-known story are being twisted by the storyteller. The humor in these two picture books draws from their metafictional elements as well as the contrast between the perspectives of children and adults. As postmodern picture books, they play with format and

expose the artistic creation of the book by having the narrator speak directly to the reader. The playfulness of the dialogue between characters assumes that the readers possess a certain knowledge base of stories and so may require a more sophisticated reader to fully appreciate the humor.

The Cat, the Dog, Little Red, the Exploding Eggs, the Wolf and Grandma is a playful story about a story of Little Red Riding Hood. A cat and pup argue their way through a reading of the traditional story with the cat exhibiting an exasperated adult response to the constant interruptions of the irrepressible, literal-minded pup. The pup is sure "The Red Hood" must have superpowers given her red cape and grows very concerned about her intelligence, pointing out "I mean, if there were a wolf dressed up as MY grandma, I might have noticed right away." His own retelling of the story and questioning about whether the cat is "absolutely sure this is a children's book" will provoke chuckles from readers. The cat and dog also have a running joke about the endpapers of the book. The illustrations are simple line drawings with only a touch of color. The words of the cat and dog are emphasized through plenty of white space and excellent use of capital letters and bold type.

The dry British humor of the text will appeal to older readers who know the traditional tale and so can appreciate the many allusions in the conversation between the cat and dog. Adults will hear themselves in the words of the frustrated cat and connect to their own interactions with literal-minded children. Both will walk away with a new view of a familiar tale and a good laugh. Younger children who are immersed in a study of many versions of Little Red Riding Hood might enjoy this book as a good ending experience, a way to play with their understandings of the traditional tale.

Christyan Fox is a freelance illustrator and writer and Diane Fox is a graphic designer, both from Thames Ditton, UK. They teach courses on picture books and are involved in packaging design, graphics, magazines and advertising in addition to creating picture books. They work together on story ideas and then Christyan does the final text and illustrations. Diane works out the page layouts and makes dummies to send to publishers as well as handles other aspects of the book business. Christyan studied animation and says that achieving movement of line is very important to him, citing Quentin Blake and Tony Ross as major influences, along with Cezanne because of his distortion of the rules of perspective to suit the needs of the image.

The Story Starts Here! is based around the humor of a young child who has decided to be contrary. The young wolf decides to start the book from the back, providing readers with directions on where to go for no other reason than “because I said so.” He also decides to play piano with his toes and wear his pants on his head, leading his exasperated parents to banish him to his bedroom. When he runs away, he finds the forest creatures fleeing from a fearsome creature, who turns out to be his own father walking on his hands because he felt like playing a joke. The reader is required to flip the book in order to continue reading the last several pages. This light hearted book about toddler rebellion encourages an interactive response from the reader and a nontraditional approach to book handling. The illustrations in colored pencils and ink along with the speech bubbles function to effectively pull readers into the world of a young child.

The book was originally published in French by Caroline Merola, a Quebec illustrator who has been published by various Canadian and American publishers. She says that she has been drawing for as long as she can remember, with a particular focus on animals, forests, friendly monsters, and mischievous children.

These two books would work well with other metafictional books that highlight the artistic process of creating a story, including *Chloe and the Lion* by Mac Barnett and Adam Rex (2012), *Warning: Do Not Open this Book!* by Adam Lehrhaupt and Matthew Forsythe (2013), *There are Cats in this Book* by Vivian Schwarz (2008), *Chester* by Melanie Watt (2008), and *We Are in a Book* by Mo Willems (2010).

Another fun text set are postmodern picture books that play on the character of wolves, such as *Beware of the Storybook Wolves* by Lauren Child (2000), *Wolves* by Emily

Gravett (2005), *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (1989), *Wait! No Paint!* By Bruce Whatley (2001), *The Three Pigs* by David Wiesner (2001), and *What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood: The Wolf's Story* by Toby Forward and I. Cohen (2005).

Further information about Caroline Merola can be found on her website. Information on Christyan and Diane Fox can be found on their website.

Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona

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Hello, Mr. Hulot

Written and illustrated by David Merveille

NorthSouth, 2013, 56 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-7358-4135-2

In the 1950's and 60's there was a French comic actor and filmmaker known as Jacques Tati. His most famous character was Monsieur Hulot. Hulot is known for his pipe, striped socks, short pants and wrinkled overcoat. *Hello, Mr. Hulot* is based on Jacques Tati's beloved French film character by the same name. The

character may be more reminiscent to an American audience as a combination of Charlie Chaplin, Mr. Bean, and Inspector Jacques Clouseau from the Pink Panther movies. Tati made several films featuring his Hulot character: *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953), *Mon Oncle* (1959), *Play Time* (1967) and *Trafic* (1971). Free of dialogue for the most part, the films are an experience in style and design as each film's scenery is of outstanding quality. The character's peculiarities and laughable adventures such as riding a bike, waiting for a bus, or visiting the zoo make for an entertaining and humorous time.

The creator of *Hello, Mr. Hulot*, David Merveille, teaches graphics and illustration at the Institute Saint-Luc of Brussels and also creates posters and illustrations for the daily newspaper *Libre Belgique*. First published in France under the title *Hello Monsieur Hulot*, David Merveille's picture book was completed as a labor of love from a long-time fan of the film character. David Merveille who both authored and illustrated *Hello, Mr. Hulot* has also created the books: *Jukebox*, *Ms. Blanche*, *The Spotless Cow*, and *Thomas the Circus Boy*.

Merveille's 1950esque graphic illustration style book has 22 captivating scenes in which a situation or joke is presented in a two-page scenario. On the first page the scenario is laid out and on the second page the situation is revealed. Several of the situations can be figured out prior, while other endings come as a complete surprise. Merveille captures the essence of Hulot's movie character in each of his short, and largely wordless comic-strip vignettes. Flat artwork and subdued colors fit the somber post-WWII setting as Hulot, with his ever present umbrella, strolls the streets of Paris. Mr. Hulot is drawn with minimum facial expressions, which is appropriate as Hulot is an everyman character. Hulot's minimal expression allow readers to put themselves in his shoes. The drawings are detailed scenes constructed from simple shapes and clean lines.

One issue with the story is that the humor in some instances may be too mature for children. Similarly, several of the scenarios such as a French military parades that require onlookers to salute patriotically, footprints from the first moonwalk, or Don Quixote tilting at windmills rest on references that may require an explanation for children. In this way *Hello, Mr. Hulot* is well suited for adults as well as children.

With a focus on the graphic approach to sharing story, a good book to pair with *Hello, Mr. Hulot* is *Go: A Kidd's Guide to Graphic Design* by Chip Kidd (2013). Graphic designer Kidd introduce young readers to design elements. Another well paired book in graphic design is the wordless book *The*

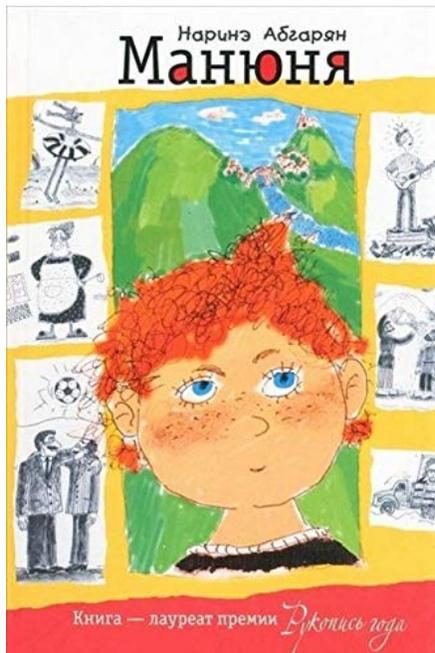
Farmer and the Clown by Maria Frazee (2014). Two wordless books by David Weisner, *Flotsam* (2008) and *Tuesday* (1997) are also a good choice to pair with *Hello, Mr. Hulot*. Both books focus on detailed illustrations to share the stories at hand inviting young readers into noticing detail. *Robot Dreams* (Sara Varon, 2007) is a good introduction to reading graphic style illustrations.

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University, Illinois

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Manyunya

Written by Narine Abgaryan

Illustrated by Elena Stanikova

Astrel, AST, Moscow, 2010, 317 pp.

ISBN: 978-5170690909

Manyunya is a very funny story about two wonderful families who live in the small Armenian town of Berd. One is an Armenian family of mother, father, and three daughters, and another is a Jewish family of father, daughter, and grandmother (everyone call her simply Gran). Gran is the scariest and the funniest character in the book. She is the Ruler of the Universe; everyone—children and adults equally—are afraid of her, and, at the same time, they absolutely adore her.

From the very beginning, Manyunya, her granddaughter, warns her new best friend Nara that everything will be fine if only she will never argue with Gran and will never pick her nose. Gran is also the best cook in the world. All that she wants is to be sure that her granddaughter and her friends always eaten enough of her wonderful cooking. And her idea of enough is often way too much for someone else.

Manyunya (the affectionate diminution of the girl's name, Maria) is a child who never stops looking for trouble. She means well but is always creating an awful turmoil all around. She falls in love with a guest of the neighbors, and she makes the life of this young man, who has no idea of her feelings a living hell. She almost kills a teacher whom she does not like just because she thinks that a gun is not loaded. But all somehow ends well. The two best friends, Nara and Manyunya, are constantly together. They are two curious little girls who never can pass by the opportunity to get into an adventure, whatever it may be—painting the wall with Nara's mother best and expensive lipstick, or messing up Gran's grandiose green walnut jam preparation.

The book talks about life in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. By that time, the Soviets authorities were not so frightening but were mostly ridiculous. It still was a time of shortage of all possible goods, when the simplest everyday things were still very difficult to buy, and one would need to stand in long lines for food and other necessities. The funniest pages of the book describe Gran's shopping. A small town is a community where everyone knows everyone. Nobody can hide anything, and at the same time, everyone helps the neighbor in need. The book gives readers that warm feeling of knowing really good people. But never read this book when other people are around. It will be too difficult to stop reading and start explaining why you are laughing out loud.

Manyunya is the first book of the trilogy. Two other books are about the girls' adventures in a summer camp, Manyunya's plan to write a fantasy novel, and Gran's magnificent birthday celebration. This book received the Manuscript of the Year Russian Literary Prize in 2010. Narine Abgaryan also wrote a picture book *Semen Andreich*, a *Chronicle in Scribbles* that

received the Russian BABY-NOSE Prize in 2013, and two novels for adult readers, *The Migrant*, and *People Who Are Always with Me*. Besides reading this book with others in the trilogy or in a study of the author, Manyunya might be paired with the American novel, *A Year Down Yonder* (Richard Peck, 2002) in which the grandmother is eccentric though greatly loved.

Olga Bukhina, International Association for the Humanities, New York

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Norman, Speak!

Written by Caroline Adderson

Illustrated by Qin Leng

Groundwood Books, 2014, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-1554983223

“But after a few days with Norman, we knew the truth. He just wasn’t very smart” (n.p).

Norman is a stray dog that has been dropped off at the animal shelter, but one day a family, who is intent on finding “the saddest dog” at the shelter to adopt, select Norman because he has been at the shelter for the longest time. Norman isn’t sad, however. He wags his stump of a tail, an action that is described lovingly as “a hula dance of happiness.” And while Norman is a very loving and happy dog, he just doesn’t do “dog” things. He doesn’t sit, come, or speak. The family is concerned that he has forgotten his name or that he wasn’t trained properly. They eventually decide that Norman just isn’t very smart, but the family loves him anyway. Norman is funny and friendly, and best of all is his dance when he greets the family at the door.

One day, the family discovers, however, that Norman is much smarter than they first thought. Going to the park, the family notices a new dog with its owner. Norman likes the new park participant, and when that black dog is called by its owner, Norman runs over, too. When the black dog sits, so does Norman. Befuddled, the family approaches the two dogs that are intently listening to the man. They also listen to discover they don’t understand a thing the man is saying. Norman doesn’t understand English, but he certainly understands Chinese!

What the family does with this new information makes for a charming and meaningful picture book that will delight readers of all ages. A wonderful addition to a text set on understanding how differences make a much more interesting world, it would pair nicely with books such as *From There to Here* (Laurel Croza, 2014), *The Geese March in Step* (Jean-Francois Dumont, 2014) or *Cuckoo!* (Fiona Robertson, 2014). A lovely picture book with illustrations done in ink on paper and then colored digitally, *Speak, Norman!* is available in both paper and electronic formatting.

Caroline Adderson lives in Vancouver, Canada with her family and dog. She has written numerous award-winning books for adults and children. *Speak, Norman!* is her first picture book. One of her award-winning books, *Middle of Nowhere*, was written for middle school readers and won the Sheila A. Egoff Children’s Literature prize. More information about Adderson can be found on her website (<http://www.carolineadderson.com/>).

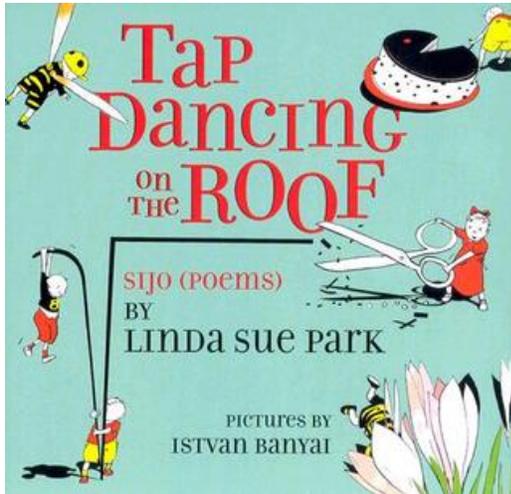
Qin Leng is a designer and illustrator who lives in Toronto, Canada. She has published a number of picture books that can be found across the world, including *Hana Hashimoto*, *Sixth Violin* (2014) and *Kamik: An Inuit Puppy Story* (2013). More information about Leng can be found on this site (<http://qinleng.tumblr.com/>).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Tap Dancing on the Roof

Written by Linda Sue Park
Illustrated by Istvan Banyai
Clarion Books, 2007, 48pp.
ISBN: 978-0618234837.

Have you heard of sijo? Do you know haiku but not sijo? Then, *Tap Dancing on the Roof* is for you. If you are looking for an enjoyable poetry book for children or craving a different type of poetry, then, *Tap Dancing on the Roof* is for you. Linda Sue Park's collection of sijo is like a magician's magic box as she transforms a simple activity like folding

laundry into a fun game. With titles like breakfast, pockets, and tennis, readers may have certain simplistic expectations, but Linda Sue Park's sijo will surprise them with well-crafted lines and creative ideas. The humor and wit invite readers to the world of sijo and leaves a remarkable impression of this poetic form. Readers will learn that anything around them can be written in sijo and take a look at things with a different level of appreciation. In this book, ordinary topics and children's lives are described with humor and wit either in three-line sijo or six-line sijo. Istvan Banyai's illustrations also add a delightful mood to the book. The author's note explains the historical background of sijo and suggests additional readings along with writing tips for this poetry.

Linda Sue Park, author of the 2002 Newbery medal winner, *A Single Shard*, introduces Korean culture, history, and traditions through her books. She has impressed readers with her thorough research on Korean culture and authentic descriptions of Korean history and traditions, and she does it again in this book. Once children read these sijo, they will feel that it is easy to create even though it may be an unfamiliar form of poetry. They may even want to twist their daily lives into extraordinary ones through writing their own sijo. As a first sijo book for children, *Tap Dancing on the Roof* is a strong introduction, making sijo accessible to children. It also paves a way for other future poets of this form. Additional information about Linda Sue Park can be found on her website (<https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewvolumevii2/9/www.lindasuepark.com>).

If readers are not familiar with sijo, it can be taught in comparison with haiku. Both sijo and haiku originate from East Asia. Sijo is a traditional Korean poetry format whereas haiku is a traditional Japanese poetry format. The history of sijo can go back to the sixth century, but it is assumed that the format of sijo appeared first in Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) and ended in Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) in Korea. Like haiku, sijo is short and has limited number of syllables in each line. Sijo in English has three lines or six shorter lines. Each line contains fourteen to sixteen syllables. The last line of sijo usually has the unexpected or funny ending that makes readers surprised or laugh. In addition, the last line of sijo reveals the theme of a poem as well. Traditional sijo did not have a title, but modern sijo has a title like western poetry. Sijo in *Tap Dancing on the Roof* creates fun and lighter feelings, but sijo can deliver serious messages too.

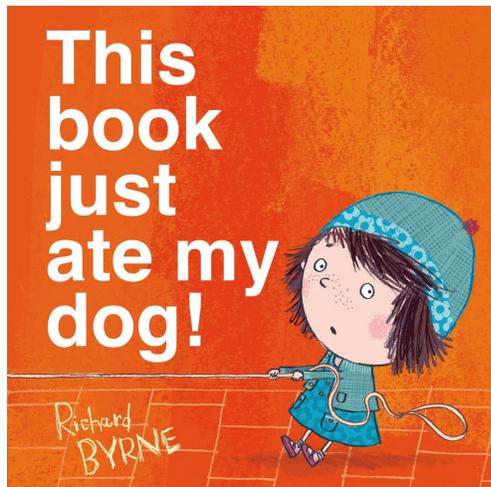
This book is the only sijo book for children published in the United States so far. However, with its similarities to haiku, other collections of haiku can be read with *Tap Dancing on the Roof*. The following three poetry books for children describe the four seasons in haiku: *Guyku, A Year of Haiku for Boys* written by Bob Raczka (2010) and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, *Hi, Koo!: A Year of Seasons* written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth (2014), and *The Year Comes Round: Haiku Through the Seasons* written by Sid Farrar and illustrated by Ilse Plume (2012).

Jongsun Wee, Winona State University, Winona, MN

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This book just ate my dog!

Written and Illustrated by Richard Byrne
Henry Holt, 2014, 32 pp.
ISBN: 978-1627790710

Bella sets off on a “stroll across the page,” with her oversized dog following on a leash, when “something very odd happened.” When she turns to look at her dog, she sees that first his front half, then his whole body, have disappeared into the gutter of the book! As Bella stands there stunned, Ben walks up and offers to help . . . but then disappears into the gutter

too, followed by Dog Rescue, the Fire Brigade, and the police. Frustrated, Bella decides to “sort this out myself” and goes to investigate. A little while after she disappears, she tosses a note to the reader out of the gutter, asking the reader to turn the book sideways and shake. Immediately the Fire Brigade, police, and Ben tumble out, followed by Bella and the dog. At first glance everything seems to be back in order but close observations by the reader show that that is not quite the case!

This clever book by Richard Byrne is sure to generate giggles from readers of all ages. Byrne cleverly and skillfully uses the gutter that joins the double-page spreads to tell an engaging story of friendship and problem-solving. The mixed media art uses complementary colors for the main images on each page, contrasted against vague grays in the background for emphasis.

Richard Byrne was born and lives in England. After working in graphic design, he discovered his passion was writing children’s books. The British language in *This book just ate my dog!*, such as “walkies” and “fire brigade” add to its charm.

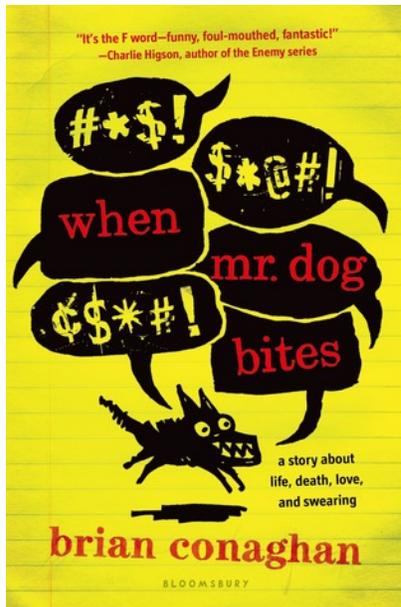
This book would work well in a text set with other books by Richard Byrne, such as *Penguins Can’t Fly: Two Friends Become TRUE Friends!* (2013) and *The Really, Really, Really Big Dinosaur* (2012). It would also work well in a text set in which the artists wove physical parts of the book into the story, such as in *Again!* (Emily Gravett, 2011), *Open Very Carefully: A Book with Bite* (Nick Bromley & Nicola O’Byrne, 2013), and *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* (Oliver Jeffers, 2006).

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When Mr. Dog Bites

Written by Brian Conaghan
Bloomsbury Press, 2014, 359 pp.
ISBN: 978-1619633469

“My name’s Doctor Cunningham. Colm Cunningham.”

“My name’s Dylan. Dylan Mint.”

The doc laughed, but I wasn’t making a joke. He told me his name, I told him my name—that’s what people do. (p. 293)

Dylan is 16 and has Tourette’s. In essence, he cannot keep himself from saying what he thinks along with other phrases that would be best kept to himself regardless of his condition. But with Tourette’s syndrome, thoughts just escape—the “bad stuff”—as does Dylan’s brutal honesty, which will keep readers laughing even as they deeply reflect on Dylan’s condition and his life truths. Throughout the story, Dylan works on controlling “Mr. Dog,” the tension that builds up inside of him as he works through having Tourette’s, and controlling the impact that the syndrome has on his life and relationships with others.

Dylan thinks that one of his life’s truths is that he is going to “cack it,” because of Tourette’s syndrome, which results from a misunderstanding he constructed when eavesdropping on one of his mother’s conversations with the doctor. Believing there is nothing to do about his fate, Dylan is in pursuit of three “cool things to do” before he dies. One has to do with a sexual conquest, the second has to do with his friend Amir, who is constantly bullied because of his ethnicity, and the third is to have his father return from the war. As Dylan and his friend Amir attempt to reach Dylan’s goals, readers encounter a character unlike they have ever met in fiction. Dylan is sensitive, hilarious, and unencumbered by pretenses that keep many adolescents from being—or seeing—themselves for who they really are. And even Dylan must face facts about who he is and who his father is, and in doing so, grows to be more confident in his abilities to negotiate relationships at school.

This narrative would make a great companion to *Marcello in the Real World* (Francesco Stork, 2011), *Stuck in Neutral* (Terry Trueman, 2001), and *Waiting for No One* (Beverly Brenna, 2011), which feature adolescents with cognitive or physical challenges. Additionally, this would make a great addition to any text set that addresses bullying for any reason, including racial, class, or gender factors. A coming-of-age story that will have readers addressing the way in which young people negotiate the world, *When Mr. Dog Bites* presents a charming anti-hero who sometimes gets confused about life, his family, and his place in the world—just like so many adolescents.

Born in Scotland, Brian Conaghan currently lives in Dublin, Ireland where he works as a teacher. *When Mr. Dog Bites* is his first book published in America. Diagnosed with Tourette's as a youngster, Mr. Conaghan was inspired to write this book from his experiences. His first adolescent novel, *The Boy Who Made it Rain*, addresses bullying. More information can be found on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLQUUIv_fRO) and from numerous websites both in the US and the UK.

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