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## Postcards

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Lesléa Newman, was set to be the featured speaker for Gay Awareness Week at the University of Wyoming the same week that college student Matthew Shepard was robbed, beaten and left to die—because he was gay. The poems in this collection are her attempt to explore the events and perspectives surrounding his horrific attack and death. They channel a variety of human and personified points of view including the fence where Shepard was tied, the deer nearby, the stars and wind, as well as the victim's mother, friends, police officers, a journalist, and even the two perpetrators. Together they paint a picture that is gripping, compelling, and heart-breaking. Yet, the book has a quiet dignity that is a fitting tribute to the young life taken too early. In addition, the poetry is beautifully crafted and Newman weaves together an impressive variety of poetic forms including haiku, "found" poems, pantoums, list poems, "This is Just to Say" poems, alphabet poems, villanelles, acrostic poems, and more, along with a section explaining each form. She provides source notes for the factual material that grounds the poems, as well as lists of books, DVDs, and websites that readers may find helpful. This is a brilliant example of how poetry can help us cope with horror in a way that facts alone cannot.

Sylvia Vardell



Lesléa Newman  
*October Mourning:  
A Song for Matthew Shepard*  
Somerville, MA: Candlewick  
Press, 2012  
111 pages

ISBN: 9780763658076  
Young Adult

Lesléa Newman's picture book, *Donovan's Big Day*, narrates the experiences of young Donovan as he prepares for his mothers' wedding that day. From the moment he wakes up to the moment his "mommy and mama" are married, he is challenged to remain on his best behavior and avoid any messy situations. He stifles his temptations to oversleep, play with his cousin Benjamin, and run around the yard with his dog in order to keep his suit clean and unwrinkled. Donovan has a special responsibility today: he is the ring bearer, and has been given the task of keeping the rings safe in his pocket. He is careful in performing his daily tasks, washing his face and brushing his teeth with the utmost care and attention, and he is happy to mingle among his family members while waiting for the ceremony to begin. Because the ultimate event is hidden from the reader until the last two pages of the book, there is a sense of suspense and excitement throughout the course of the storybook. When it is finally time to give the rings to mommy and mama, Donovan is sure to show his mothers just how much he loves them—by kissing the brides. Newman's heartwarming story is told alongside captivatingly illustrations, and this progressive picturebook is a wonderful addition to any child's collection.

Samantha Christensen



Lesléa Newman  
*Donovan's Big Day*  
Illus. Mike Dutton  
Berkeley: Tricycle Press, 2011  
30 p.

ISBN: 978-1-58246-332-2  
(Picture book, 2+)

*The Girl of the Wish Garden: A Thumbelina Story* is a loose retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's Thumbelina. An author's note explains the inspiration behind the revision. Uma Krishnaswami, who first fell in love with Hans Christian Andersen's stories at the age of eight while living in India, was inspired to write this book after encountering Nasrin Khosravi's illustrations for a Farsi picture book edition of the Thumbelina story. The illustrations are captivating, a compound of late impressionism and cubism. The illustrations deviate in places from the original Thumbelina plot, and since this retelling is inspired by the paintings, Krishnaswami follows them, although she retains some key elements from the original, especially using the convention of story as a poet's dream. The text of the story is spare, written in free verse poetic style, following the surreal dream narrative of the paintings. The result is an engaging poem that follows the fluid dynamic of the paintings, shifting landscapes, and narrative atmosphere. As a Thumbelina retelling should, this story brings the reader into the enlarged world of the tiny protagonist, an enchanting environment of interaction with frogs, mice, swallows, and horses.

Taylor Kraayenbrink

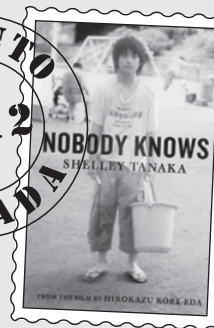


Uma Krishnaswami  
*The Girl of the Wish Garden:  
A Thumbelina Story*  
Toronto: Groundwood  
Books, 2013  
32 pages

155498324X  
(Picturebook, 3+)

As an adaptation of a Japanese film intended primarily for adults, *Nobody Knows* by Shelley Tanaka is an unusual addition to the North American children's book landscape. Stills from *Dare mo shiranai* (2004), directed by noted filmmaker and documentarian Hirokazu Koreeda, grace the cover and some of the pages of Tanaka's minimalist but compelling novella for tween readers. This heartbreaking tale of four children who struggle to survive for a time on their own in Tokyo rings true partially because Koreeda's subtle and elegant film is based on actual events that occurred in the late 1980s. Written in the third person from the perspective of twelve-year-old Akira, Tanaka's prose mimics the documentary style of the film, displaying a sensitivity that rarely crosses over into the sentimental. This balance was undoubtedly difficult to achieve, given that the narrative describes the everyday travails that Akira and his three younger siblings experience after their flighty and overwhelmed mother essentially abandons them. The strength of Tanaka's emotionally powerful story lies in the absence of moralizing, whether on the part of the narrator or the children themselves. Tanaka achieves this feat by relying primarily on dialogue and clear-eyed, spare description of the children's matter-of-fact approach to daily survival. Young readers will be challenged to form their own judgments about the psychological and social implications of this unforgettable story.

Melek Ortobasi



Shelley Tanaka  
*Nobody Knows*  
 Toronto; Groundwood  
 Books, 2012  
 144 pages

(8-12)  
 ISBN: 978-1-55489-140-3

*Nataberne* is an imaginative story that draws the reader into a world of fun, fancy, and some crazy primates. Bea is a young girl who enjoys bedtime because it allows her to visit the world of her friends, the night monkeys. These characters resemble members of her family and community, and Bea learns more about her mother, father, siblings and friends through this dream realm than she ever could have imagined. Sitoy's narrative creates a world where silly fancy become amusing reality, and Brøgger's illustrations draw the reader in while remaining unique and original. The text itself is detailed and clever, so the story will resonate best with young children who are capable of following advanced vocabulary, but still enjoy a picture book. The story offers characters who have the ability to escape from the mundane activities and unfair restrictions of every day life to teach the primary character Bea, and the reader, to enjoy the freedom of childhood as long as possible, and to realize that appearances are not always what they seem. An interesting and eccentric story full of creativity and imagination, *The Night Monkeys* will send the reader off into a dreamland of strange creatures and even stranger actions, where adventure seems to lurk around every corner.

Tia Lalani



Lakambini Sitoy  
*Nataberne*  
 {The Night Monkeys}  
 Illus. by Lilian Brøgger  
 Copenhagen: Forlaget  
 Hjulet, 2010  
 44 pages

ISBN: 9788789213637  
 (Picture Book, Ages 6-10)



*That's Life* joins a series of outstanding scientific literacy books for children by Robert Winston. It explores life and its rich diversity around major themes of contemporary biology including the cellular basis of life, the evolutionary history of biological diversity, ecological interactions and adaptation. Biological diversity and processes are illustrated with an impressive selection of engaging biological stories, from extreme places and organisms, to the unforeseen life hiding in familiar places. Clever, instructive and fun illustrations and a wealth of great photographs bring the author's writing to life in a very appealing and accessible book. Winston achieves the delicate balance of writing about biological concepts with remarkable clarity without oversimplifying them and portrays scientific inquiry with integrity, presenting what we do not understand as exciting challenges.

Doris Audet



Robert Winston  
*That's Life*  
Dorling Kindersley, 2012  
96 pages

ISBN: 9781405391504  
(Illus., 7+)

Some books tell us a story; others cherish one. Some writers create a plot, others an atmosphere. Aka and Koprucu are two fresh authors creating a magical atmosphere through words and colors. They tell us about two lovers, Day and Night, whose contradictory natures laid an ambush to separate them. The adventure starts one night, as the Moon suddenly falls from its location making a voice "similar to the voice created as a sad bird stops chirping" and leaves behind an abyss "as black as burned forests." Since Night is terribly scared of the dark, he goes to Day who is "as bright as the day." As Night and Day find the Moon and place it where it belongs, the readers float among the pages as if flying in navy skies. When Day and Night part making promises for tiny reunions, you regret that you have to leave this sweet atmosphere and come back to the real world... a farewell to this naïve couple until the next twilight. The lyrical wording, harmonized by sentimental illustrations and clever graphical games (an actual hole created by the fall of the moon) make this book a piece to be valued by those who are after turning the impossible to possible.

Tülin Kozikoglu



Serkan Aka and  
Ayşe Pinar Koprucu  
*Lunar Eclipse*  
Illus. Serkan Aka  
Istanbul: İletisim Publishing,  
2012  
40 pages

ISBN: 9789750510281  
(Illus. 8+)

*In Kummallisuuksien käsikirja* [The book of oddities], Mauri Kunnas, a famous Finnish author and illustrator, leads the readers to an incredible journey throughout every kind of mystery from ancient to modern times, from the Earth to the open space. This picture book, wonderfully illustrated and full of humorous elements like most Kunnas's works, offers legends and short stories from all over the world. Even though the book contains many spooky characters (vampires, skeletons, and fire dragons), they do not frighten young readers since characters have funny and ironical features since, such as vampires survive well on tomato soup, strawberries, or red beets. This book might be considered a "crossover" for different reasons. First, it contains a large variety of mysterious and supernatural elements that might appeal an audience of both children and adults. Second, since most illustrations used here are taken from many Kunnas's previous works (e.g. funny ghosts, vampires with terrible toothaches, a sleepwalking goat, Easter Island statues, and UFOs), they might be familiar also to adults who read those books as children. The last part of this picture book boasts activities in which readers can test their knowledge, and therefore their reading comprehension, on the oddities of the world.

Melissa Garavini



Mauri Kunnas  
*Kummallisuuksien käsikirja*  
 Illis. Mauri Kunnas  
 Helsinki, Finland:  
 Otava, 2011  
 80 pp.

ISBN 978-951-1-25207-8  
 (Picturebook, age +3)