

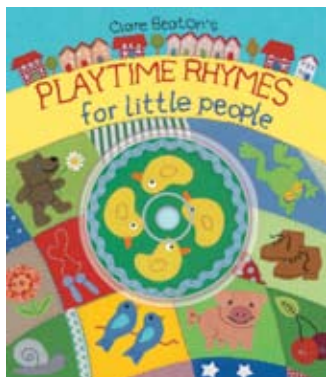


The Reading Chair

***Playtime Rhymes for Little People*, by Clare Beaton, illustrator. Compiled by Mary Finch. Music arranged and composed by Susan Reed. Hardcover book with CD. 2008. Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books. 64 pp. ISBN 9781846861567. Ages birth to 5.**

Clare Beaton's book of 40 finger rhymes for children is exceptional. With only one rhyme per page, Beaton devotes plenty of space to illustrating each one with her warm fabric-and-felt sewn designs, incorporating buttons, beads, and bric-a-brac. The included CD features the tune for each rhyme, which is particularly helpful for any that are unfamiliar. Upbeat guitar, banjo, and fiddle accompany the sung rhymes. Beaton also suggests finger, hand, and body movements.

From the popular "Incy Wincy Spider" to the beloved "These Are Grandmother's Glasses" to the less-known "My Ship Sailed from China," there are plenty of rhymes for everyone, from babies to kindergartners.



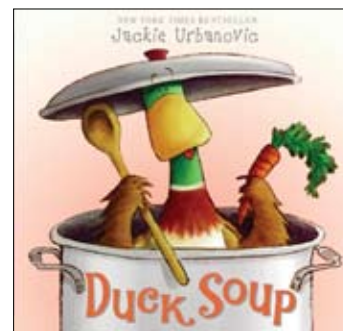
***Duck Soup*, by Jackie Urbanovic. 2008. New York: HarperCollins. 32 pp. ISBN 9780061214417. Ages 3 to 6.**

The cast of characters in *Duck Soup* made its debut in *Duck at the Door* (reviewed in *Young Children*, September 2007; read it at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns/readingchair), a book about a woman named Irene and her houseful of animals who adopt Max, a duck, when he decides he would rather stay with them than fly south for the winter. The author casts them as both a motley and lovable family.

In this sequel, Max is an established member of the household, fashioning himself as an accomplished chef. One evening, he slips into the garden to find just the right herb for his simmering soup. The other animals

arrive home to find a pot on the stove but no Max. Where could he be? They're frantic when they decide that there's only one logical answer: he must have fallen into the soup! A rescue operation ensues, involving a strainer, the sink, and a wooden spoon.

In her acknowledgements, Urbanovic jokes that she borrowed the title of this book from a Marx Brothers movie. Apparently, she has also taken a page from them on using slapstick humor. Children will love being in-the-know about Max's whereabouts while they watch the hilarity unfold. Dramatic facial expressions abound in the bold and colorful illustrations, including the spread in which Max walks in with the herbs to meet a shocked but relieved houseful of animals. This is a wonderful read-aloud!



***How To Heal a Broken Wing*, by Bob Graham. 2008. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. 40 pp. ISBN 9780763639037. Ages 3 to 7.**

In this mesmerizing book, a boy named Will discovers an injured bird lying in a busy city square. While adults walk this way and that, overlooking the bird, Will notices, and the story's main theme of taking the time to care for others begins to develop. Will and his mother take the bird home, where rehabilitating it becomes a family project. Using multipanel illustrations that appear as a sequence of snapshots on each page, readers see the family wrap the bird's wing, prepare a box for it to stay in, and feed it with a dropper. This style of illustration enables Graham to portray interesting minutiae,

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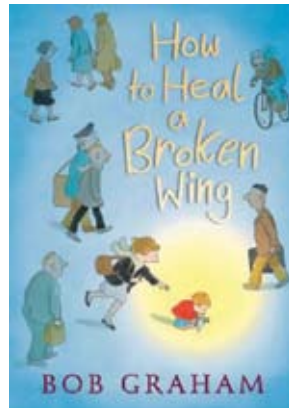
Miriam Baker Schiffer, MFA, is a writer.

Chair illustration by Diane Greenseid.

This column is available online at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.

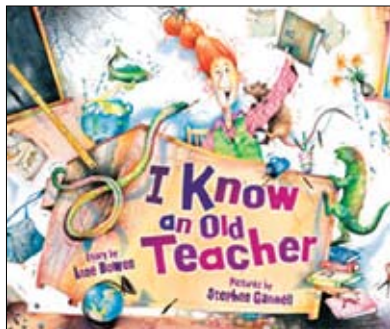
like the phases of the moon that pass as the bird heals. Graham also uses full pages and double-page spreads to draw attention to the most powerful moments in the story—when the bird hits the ground, when Will picks it up, and when he and his parents finally set it free.

Many pages are wordless. Graham uses a sparse but well-chosen seven sentences to tell the story; his illustrations do the rest. Muted earth tones pervade each page, but Will brings brightness to the story. As soon as he picks the bird up, color begins to radiate in the cityscape around him, as if his concern for the bird breathes life back into the city. Graham wants to help children reconnect with nature. He also wants to show the “curiosity and empathy [that children have] about the world around them” and remind readers that “care and attention can sometimes fix broken wings.” Children will discuss this moving story long after they have finished reading it.



***I Know an Old Teacher*, by Anne Bowen. Illus. by Stephen Gammell. 2008. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda. 32 pp. ISBN 9780822579847. Ages 4 to 7.**

Because of the long weekend, Mrs. Bindley, the class teacher, takes all of the class pets home with her. She promises to take good care of them. But then something unexpected happens. A flea falls from her unkempt head



of frizzy orange hair, and it lands in her tea, whereupon she accidentally swallows it. “I know an old teacher who swallowed a flea,” sing her students as they peer in through her window. “It fell from her hair and plopped into her

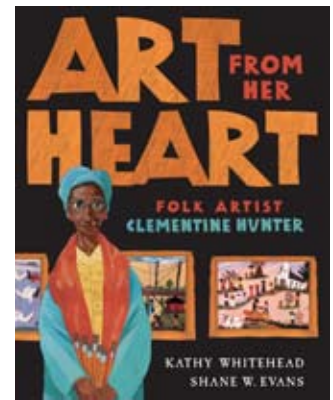
tea . . . A nasty flea? How can that be?” Thus begins this new rendition of the classic song, “I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly.” Children gather at the window to discuss what happens next: “I know an old teacher who swallowed a spider. It crawled down the wall and then sat down beside her. She swallowed the spider to gobble the flea that fell from her hair and plopped into her tea.” It’s not long before she must swallow the classroom pets one by one in order to go after that flea.

An elementary school teacher for over 30 years, Bowen conceived of this adaptation after she saw how much her students loved the classic. This version is just disgusting enough to tickle young readers, and they have Stephen Gammell (Caldecott Honor book *The Relatives Came*) to thank for that. His colorful illustrations of watercolor, colored pencil, and pastel depict a teacher whose appearance fluctuates between pallor, jaundice, and shades of green as she gobbles a rat, sucks down a snake, and chews on a lizard.

Children will be delighted to get a peek at the absurd private life of this otherwise lovely teacher.

***Art from Her Heart: Folk Artist Clementine Hunter*, by Kathy Whitehead. Illus. by Shane W. Evans. 2008. New York: Penguin. 32 pp. ISBN 9780399242199. Ages 5 and up.**

As a laborer on the Melrose Plantation in Louisiana and a descendant of slaves, Clementine Hunter wasn’t going to find her artistic inspiration by traveling the world or buying the best paints and materials. Rather than wait for any of that, “in the middle of her hundred years” she decided to paint with what she had—the scraps and leftovers from a well-known artists’ colony at the plantation.



This is the inspiring story of a woman who painted with no lessons and few materials. She painted scenes from everyday life, including weddings, graduations, and baptisms. She held her own art exhibition, where she pinned pictures on clothelines. Eventually her art was featured in a major museum in New Orleans. Segregation laws meant that she couldn’t attend her own exhibit during museum hours, but her popularity grew at the same time that segregation was being dismantled.

Whitehead tells the story in text simple enough to be accessible for young children. Her author’s note reveals excellent additional information about the history of Hunter’s life and career, which teachers can incorporate into classroom discussions. Evans’s painted illustrations are rich with color, and he recreates some of Clementine’s work in his own illustrations.

Today, Hunter’s artwork is highly valued for the glimpse it gives us of plantation life, and this book is a moving portrayal of her commitment to sharing that with the world.

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