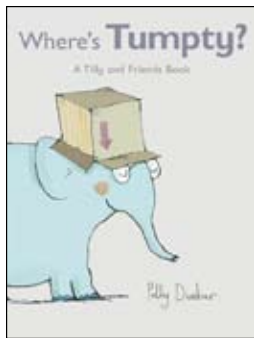




The Reading Chair

***Where's Tumpty?* by Polly Dunbar. 2009. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. 32 pp. ISBN 9780763642730. Ages 2 to 5.**



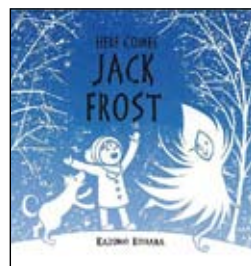
This is one of the best titles in a delightful new series, the Tilly and Friends Books. Tumpty is trying his hardest to hide from his friends, but it's no easy task for the large elephant. Children will love being in the know as he tries one spot after the next. Behind the skinny plant? Under a small box? With his eyes closed?

Tumpty's friends arrive on the scene one by one, and readers will quickly get to know their indi-

vidual and endearing personalities. Hector, the piglet, tends to despair. Tiptoe, the rabbit, is quiet and demure. Pru, the gussied up hen, is nobody's fool. Tilly, a little girl, is their sensible leader.

Finally, Tumpty finds a proper hiding spot, and with child-like sensibilities, his friends look high and low until they worry they may never find him again. With fresh mixed-media illustrations in lighthearted watercolor-like pastels and plenty of negative space on the page, this cast of characters comes to life. As Tilly has probably imagined the animals into being, readers will do the same and welcome these new friends into their day.

***Here Comes Jack Frost*, by Kazuno Kohara. 2009. New York: Roaring Brook. 28 pp. ISBN 9781596434424. Ages 2 to 6.**



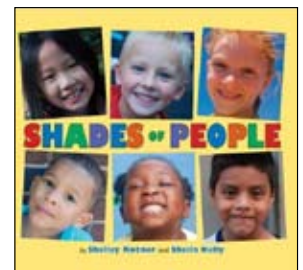
Jack Frost, the mythical man of winter, has come upon a boy who dislikes the season and prefers to stay inside. But the boy can't resist following him out into the snow to see just who Jack Frost is. In following him, the boy skates across a pond, sleds down a hill, and throws a few snowballs, discovering the fun of sharing

the snowy outdoors with his new friend. But winter yields to the changing seasons, and soon Jack Frost must depart.

This is a powerful book that captures the magic of winter and creates a sense of wonder about the natural world. Gorgeous illustrations, which appear to be woodcut prints, transform from grays and browns to shades of bright blue with white as the boy makes his way outside. It's a sad moment when Jack Frost departs, but in a lovely nod to the reassuring ebb and flow of the seasons, the boy is certain that he hears Frost whisper, "See you next winter!"

***Shades of People*, by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly. 2009. New York: Holiday House. 28 pp. ISBN 9780823421916. Ages 3 to 7.**

This photo-essay about the shades of our skin is a pleasure to peruse. Its opening premise, that skin comes in many shades rather than colors, suggests to the reader that we are all on the same spectrum, none of us so different from the next. "There's pink, rose and almond; shades of gold, bronze and brown. . . . Our skin is just our covering, like wrapping paper. And you can't tell what someone is like from the color of their skin."



The photographs include bright-eyed close-ups and candid shots of children playing. One section is devoted to biracial families, which are particularly hard to come by in children's books. "Even in the same family," write Rotner and Kelly, "there can be many shades." For an activity, examine the different shades of objects found in the classroom or the different shades of paint that can be blended on paper. The book concludes with an image of hands of eight shades coming together as if making a pact.

Isabel Baker, MAT, MLS, is president of The Book Vine for Children, a national company dedicated to getting good books into the hands of preschool children and their teachers. Isabel has worked as a children's librarian and is currently a presenter on early literacy and book selection.

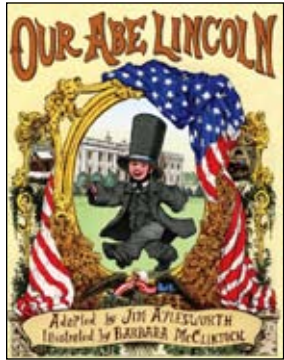
Miriam Baker Schiffer, MFA, is a writer.

Chair illustration by Diane Greenseid.

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

Our Abe Lincoln, adapted by Jim Aylesworth. Illus. by Barbara McClintock. 2009. New York: Scholastic. 32 pp. ISBN 9780439925488. Ages 3 and up.

This book arrived as we celebrated the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Here, a group of schoolchildren puts on a play about Honest Abe for their families and friends. Each double-page spread portrays a scene from their performance, a snapshot of Lincoln's life, from his humble roots in Illinois to his work in Washington. Lincoln's difficult presidency is made accessible to young readers through Aylesworth's accompanying lyrics, set to the catchy tune of the folk song "The Old Grey Mare" (musical score included) that was popular during Lincoln's presidential campaigns. "Babe



Abe Lincoln was born in the wilderness, Born in the wilderness, Born in the wilderness," starts the song.

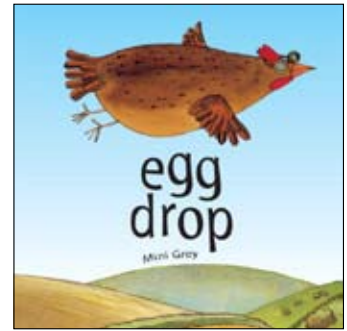
Not all school plays come with such an expert costume designer: McClintock's pen and ink illustrations depict the women wearing realistic bonnets, hats, and long billowing skirts and dresses. For the men, it's suspenders and patched-up pants or three-piece suits with top hats. McClintock thoughtfully integrates the multicultural cast. "Wise Abe Lincoln said, 'NO MORE!' to slavery," with supporters both Black and White standing behind him and men of both backgrounds suiting up in his army, as they did at the time. In doing so, the book manages to address slavery and avoid uncomfortable racial typecasting of the schoolchildren. Excellent historical notes at the end offer the teacher additional talking points, and Mary Todd Lincoln's Vanilla Almond Cake recipe is included too.

Egg Drop, by Mini Grey. 2009. New York: Knopf. 28 pp. ISBN 9780375842603. Ages 4 to 8.

A hen tells the chicks in her coop a cautionary tale of an egg that wanted to fly like a bird or an airplane. "If only it had waited," says the hen to her eager young listeners (and children will be just as rapt as the chicks). "It didn't know much about flying (and it didn't know anything about aerodynamics . . .)."

While this quirky story at first casts doubt about the prospect of an egg in flight, the reader's faith grows as the

egg's determination grows too. Finally, the egg climbs up "a very tall tower made of bricks on a hill," ascending 583 stone steps to the top. As it steps off the top of the building and into the sky, the egg feels "an enormous egg rush" and declares, "I am flying!" It's not clear what will happen next, but with an egg in midair, the tension is palpable.

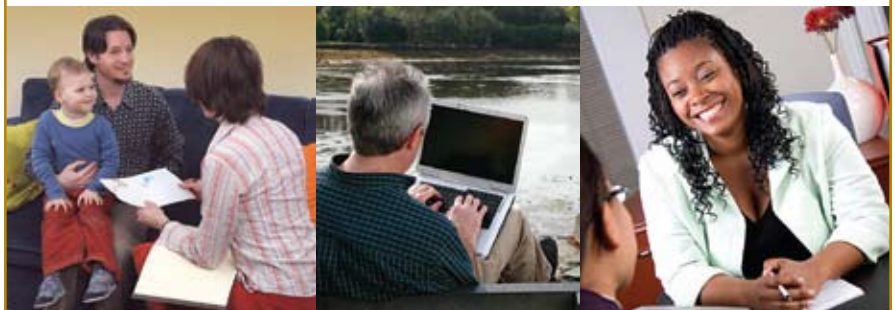


Unfortunately for the egg—and to the amusement of the reader—reality reasserts itself: "But the Egg was not flying. It was falling." A Humpty-Dumptyesque attempt to piece it back together ensues, but not even chewing gum or Band-Aids can repair the damage. Here's the eye-popping surprise: lest the egg be wasted, it is served for breakfast instead (it's always good to be useful), jolting readers out of the realm of animate eggs and back to the familiar reality of their kitchen tables.

This is a delightfully unexpected tale about taking one's time to grow up and about seeing the bright side of an unfortunate situation (the egg yolk wears a smile upon being turned into a pleasing breakfast). Mini Grey's colorful illustrations, which appear to be a compilation of photographs, cut paper, and watercolor paint, lend just the right humor.

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