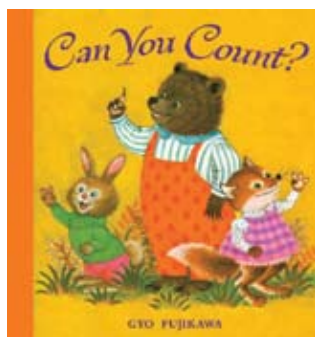


The Reading Chair



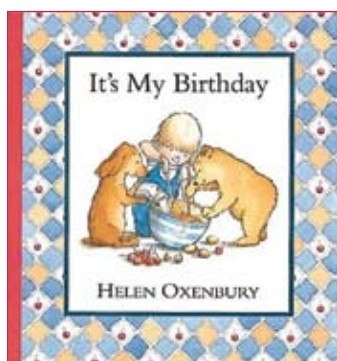
***Can You Count?* by Gyo Fujikawa. 2010. New York: Sterling. ISBN 9781402768248. 18 pp. Ages birth to 3.**

This classic animal counting book, reissued here in board book format, showcases Fujikawa's skill in connecting with the youngest readers. Counting is secondary to examining a variety of animals (ferret, flamingo, koala, tiger, snail, and more). The warm and colorful illustrations offer realistic renditions, although most of the animals also don stylistic accessories, such as a babushka for the turtle and a pair of suspenders to hold up the hippo's oversized plaid pants. Children can count the animals, point to and identify them, or just spend time examining a book full of charming furry, feathered, and leathered friends.



***It's My Birthday*, by Helen Oxenbury. 2010. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press. ISBN 9780763649708. 20 pp. Ages birth to 3.**

Helen Oxenbury, the queen of illustrating babies, has created a perfect book for toddlers. Originally published in 1993, it is reissued now in a (generously sized) board book format. This is the simple, progressive story of a little boy who asks his animal friends for help doing something that young readers love to watch: baking and enjoying a birthday cake.



The chicken provides the eggs, the bear asks his mother for some milk, the monkey picks the cherries, and they all help pour the ingredients into the bowl. Charming illustrations cap-

ture the earnestness with which all of the animals work and the suspense they feel as they wait for the little boy to slice the cake and begin the party. A recipe is included.

***Miss Lina's Ballerinas*, by Grace Maccarone. Illus. by Christine Davenier. 2010. New York: Macmillan. ISBN 9780312382438. 40 pp. Ages 3 to 7.**



Meet Miss Lina's eight ballerinas: Christina, Edwina, Sabrina, Justina, Katrina, Bettina, Marina, and Nina. They plié, relevé, pirouette, and jeté in four neat rows of two, and their perfectly synchronized movements are mirrored by the zippy rhyme that carries this book.

Life seems complete for the dancers. "They danced doing math. They danced while they read. And after their supper, they danced into bed." But their synchronicity comes to a quick halt when a new ballerina, Regina, joins their troupe. When the nine of them try to dance in their usual four rows of two, they trip, bump, and stumble all over themselves and Miss Lina. Just as the dancers' exasperation reaches its peak, Miss Lina offers a solution. "'There, there,' said Miss Lina. 'You will soon see how delightful it is to be three rows of three.'"

Soon the dancers have a new routine, one that incorporates their new friend Regina. The story emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness and the usefulness of problem-solving skills and math. The book may be targeting a certain audience with its pink-hued pages, but the story will appeal to dancers and non-dancers alike. The rhyme and the illustrations, by Christine Davenier of France, are reminiscent of Bemelmans' *Madeline*.

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 online at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.

***Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth*, by Mary McKenna Siddals. Illus. by Ashley Wolff. 2010. New York: Random House. ISBN 9781582463162. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.**



This book offers a recipe of a different sort. Far more than an alphabet book, it's an A to Z rollicking, rhyming tour of the ingredients one can add to the compost pot. "Apple cores / Bananas, bruised / Coffee grounds with filters, used / . . . Just add to the pot / and let it all rot / into Compost Stew." McKenna Siddals covers the usual suspects, like grass clippings and kitchen scraps. But she adds unexpected items such as "Laundry lint / from dryer traps," "Hair snippings," and "Teabags plucked from / long, hot swimmings."

Composting can be intimidating for the uninitiated, but the rich language and detailed collage illustrations make the reader want to join the fun. Don't overlook the interesting endpapers, which offer a slice of soil-life underground, full of rich dirt, worms, and rocks.

***Our Grandparents: A Global Album*, by Maya Ajmera, Sheila Kinkade, and Cynthia Pon. 2010. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. ISBN 9781570914584. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 8.**

Grandparents and grandchildren share a special relationship. In his introduction to the book, Archbishop Desmond



Tutu writes that the joyful innocence of grandchildren allows us to appreciate life's simple pleasures again, and that grandparents "help bridge the present with the past." With beautiful photographs from around the world

(each country is noted), the book's authors demonstrate many of the ways that grandparents and grandchildren connect. "Our grandparents love us. They give the biggest hugs and hold our hands. Even when we speak softly, they listen. They encourage us."

As readers peruse moving photographs of the two generations flying a kite, making tamales, learning the banjo, planting seedlings, sharing old photographs, lighting a menorah, and more, the book's message is clear: No matter where they live, grandparents and grandchildren everywhere share

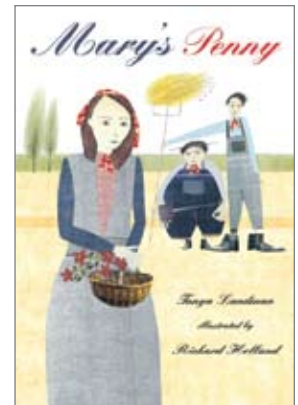
something special. The customs and clothing portrayed add to the richness of the book.

The words *grandma* and *grandpa* are translated into 19 languages, including Hawaiian, Yiddish, Haitian Creole, Hindi, and Vietnamese. Activity suggestions on the last page offer ways to explore the past, record memories, play, and plan adventures with grandparents. Includes a biracial family.

***Mary's Penny*, by Tanya Landman. Illus. by Richard Holland. 2010. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press. 32 pp. ISBN 9780763647681. Ages 4 to 8.**

In this retelling of an old folktale, a farmer tests his two sons' intelligence to determine which one of them will inherit the family farm. To pass the test, each son will have to fill the house with something that costs only a penny. The farmer doesn't think to include his daughter in the challenge.

Quaintly styled illustrations beckon earlier times when gendered attitudes such as the farmer's were more common. But lest this book seem old-fashioned, Landman bridges the gap between then and now with bursts of playful language that speak to the modern reader.



When one brother buys a cart-load of feathers with his penny, Landman explains, "This was long, long ago—way back in the golden, olden days—and you could buy an awful lot of feathers for a penny." She addresses the story's feminist themes head-on. When the farmer's daughter, Mary, asks to be given a chance to inherit the farm, her father sputters, "You? But you're a girl! Everyone knows that girls can't run farms."

After watching her brothers fumble through the test, Mary proves herself. With her penny, she fills the house with the light of a small candle and the music of a flute she crafted from a hollow reed. In awe, her father says, "Mary . . . you have filled [the house] with light, and so filled it with knowledge. You have filled it with music, and so filled it with joy. And because you have filled the house with light and knowledge and music and joy, you have also filled the house with wisdom. You shall run the farm from this day forward."

In this tale about questioning assumptions, cleverness wins out, a common and satisfying theme in good children's literature. It will also appeal to children's eagerness to crack a puzzle.

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