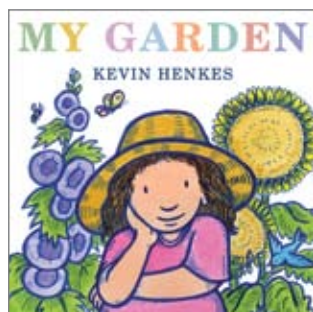




The Reading Chair

***My Garden*, by Kevin Henkes. 2010. New York: Harper-Collins. ISBN 9780061715174. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 6.**

In this ode to growing a garden, readers can't help but feel a connection to the magic of nature. With hose in hand, a young girl helps water and weed her mother's garden, while her thoughts drift to the imaginary garden she'd like for herself. There would be no weeds. Flowers would never die; they would grow back as soon as they were picked. Instead of lettuce-eating rabbits, the girl's garden would be full of delicious chocolate rabbits. The tomatoes would be the size of beach balls, and carrots would be invisible because she doesn't like carrots.



The book juxtaposes pictures of the mother's lush garden with pictures of the girl's dream garden. Both are inviting. The examples Henkes chooses and the text and illustrations that accompany them will draw in child readers and will remind adults of long-ago days when they may have sat pulling weeds in a garden and imagined a jelly bean growing into a jelly bean bush.

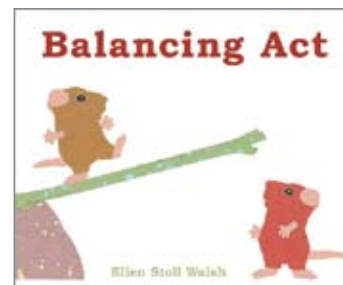
The book is beautifully produced, from the sunflowers that greet readers on the endpapers to the thick, quality paper pages that are so pleasing to touch. Spring and summer colors abound!

***Balancing Act*, by Ellen Stoll Walsh. 2010. New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN 9781442407572. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.**

When the other animals want to join two mice on the teeter-totter (well, in this case, a twig balanced atop a rock), it takes a balancing act to keep their weight evenly distributed. There are some "Whoa!" and "Uh-oh!" moments. But with effort, the frogs, salamanders, and mice keep this seesaw off the ground. When a big bird arrives, it takes bal-

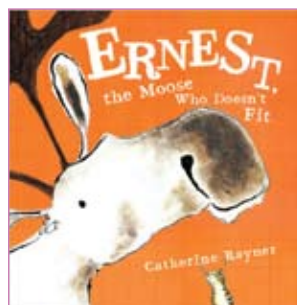
ance to another level of creative thinking!

Walsh uses cut paper illustrations, seemingly splatter-painted to give an organic appearance, and plenty of white space so that the eyes know where to go. The result is a perfect introduction to *balance* in which no color or words are wasted. This lovely story of friendship begs to be extended at the sand table, on the playground, or in the science area.



***Ernest, the Moose Who Doesn't Fit*, by Catherine Rayner. 2009. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux. ISBN 9780374322175. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.**

Fitting in is a recurring social theme for children. For Ernest, the main moose of this book, fitting in isn't just a social issue but a logistical one too. He's so large and tall that he can't fit all of himself onto the page. Using inventive vocabulary and alliteration, Rayner shows how Ernest "struggles to SHIMMY, SHIFT, and SHUFFLE in forward" and "SQUIDGE, SQUODGE, and SQUEEZE in backward," but to no avail. "Ernest's middle fits in easily. But what about the rest of him?"



In her illustrations, Rayner captures an endearing animal whose emotions range from perplexed to disappointed to determined. Just when things are looking bleak, Ernest's small chipmunk friend has a big idea. Readers wonder what the two are up to as they busily

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Chair illustration by Diane Greenseid.

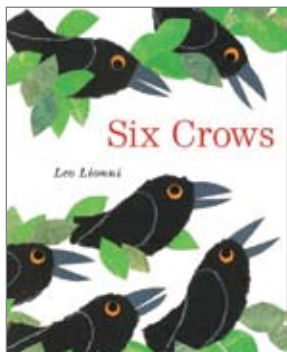
This column is available online at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.

collect bits of paper to carry out their plan. In a dramatic ending, a gatefold appears. Illustrated as a hodgepodge of scrap paper and tape, it opens out and then up into a gigantic piece of paper, four times the size of the book, just the right size for Ernest, who now fits in perfectly.

Graph paper in the background of each page encourages the mathematical thinking that helped Ernest and his chipmunk friend solve the problem. Their use of scrap paper is a nice nod to environmentalism. What's most satisfying is that with equal parts friendship, cooperation, and creative problem solving, Ernest and his friend show readers that fitting in is sometimes a matter of rethinking parameters.

***Six Crows*, by Leo Lionni. [1988] 2010. New York: Random House. ISBN 9780375845505. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 7.**

In this reissue of one of Leo Lionni's classics, a farmer and a flock of crows become increasingly hostile. They try to outfrighten each other so they can have a coveted wheat field to themselves. The farmer uses ever fiercer scarecrows, and the crows fly past with ferocious kites in the shape of large birds to scare the scarecrows right back.



Lionni's collage illustrations are lush, and the eyes on the birds and scarecrows convey the intensity of their emotions.

The setting feels far away. The farmer wears a turban and beard and carries a staff, and the place is called Balabadur Hills. But the characters' plight will feel familiar to readers everywhere. Thank goodness

for the wise owl, who counsels both parties, "It's never too late to talk things over," for "words can do magic." As the farmer and the crows discover, cooperation and tolerance can make life better for everyone involved.



***The Green Mother Goose: Saving the World One Rhyme at a Time*, by Jan Peck and David Davis. Illus. Carin Berger. 2011. New York: Sterling. ISBN 9781402765254. 32 pp. Ages 5 and up.**

It's not easy to adapt Mother Goose rhymes, but Peck and Davis nail it as they give new life to 30 "recycled" classics like "Humpty Dumpty" and "There

Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe." This time the stories are crafted with environmentalism in mind, and rhymes are skillfully mastered, not forced. The message to conserve, recycle, and be good to the earth is clear.

The authors maintain the subtle humor enjoyed in the original stories. Here is their new take on "Jack Sprat": "Jack Sprat ate fast-food fat, / His wife ate leafy greens. / Now she is fit, and healthy, too, / While Jack's outgrown his jeans!" In "Old Mother Hubbard," rather than looking for a bone, Mrs. Hubbard runs to and fro finding healthy organic foods that meet her dog's approval. Berger's playful illustrations are collages made from found paper. Children who know the original rhymes can best appreciate these adaptations.

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