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INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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# BULLETIN

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VOLUME 12, NUMBERS 4 & 5, 1981      ISSN 0146-5562

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## ROMANCE SERIES FOR YOUNG READERS:

A Report to Educators and Parents  
in Concert with the  
National Education Association



# BULLETIN

VOLUME 12, NUMBERS 4 & 5

1981

**SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE ON PRETEEN AND TEENAGE ROMANCE SERIES**

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*Alternative Press Index*  
*Education Index*  
 ERIC IRCD

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## About Romance Series

The new wave of pre teen and teenage romances can be viewed merely as trivial trash, unworthy of placement in this nation's schools for quick sales promotion. The wave can also be viewed as one of many efforts our patriarchal system is making to maintain power over women's lives.

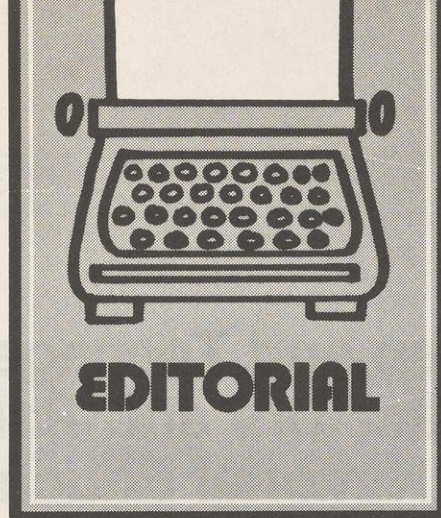
Patriarchy is defined as a political structure that privileges men. It is maintained in slightly different ways in different countries. Whatever the combination of ways used—religion, custom, law or physical force, patriarchy also involves control over minds and values. Both men and women must be taught to believe that women's role is primarily to bear and rear children.

Today, women are struggling for reproductive rights, for day care, for lesbian rights, for males to play an equal role in household tasks and in childrearing; these are all struggles against a patriarchal power and male privilege. They are all struggles to make women—as a group—independent of male largesse and control.

But the team now wearing the "Poppa Power" jerseys is formidable. They include the "Right to Lifers," the Congressional "Budget Cutters" (eliminating day-care funds and job training for women), the Congressional "Bill Makers" (forbidding textbooks that present females in non-traditional roles), the State "Anti-ERAers," the "Moral Majorityers"—and the "Romance Brainwashers." These "Brainwashers" are perhaps the most dangerous players, because they aim to induce a new generation to internalize patriarchal values, thus convincing women that they need not even form a team.

The "Brainwashers" have been victorious in the past. Women were hauled out of their homes to work while men were fighting WWII. When "Poppa Power" had other needs, an incredible government-led campaign emerged to convince women that home was their intended place and childcare their intended role. Women went back to the home until the early 1970's. It happened in Germany, too. The women's movement scored major advances in the early part of this century (see *Ms.* magazine, Oct. and Nov., 1980). When Hitler wanted babies for the Fatherland, the slogan "Kinder, Küche, Kirche," plus brainwashing, drove women back to the home once more.

The literature of any period reflects the politics of that period—and this is a



regressive political time. So what do we do about the romance novels? As concerned educators working towards a more egalitarian society, we must challenge patriarchal values and controls whenever and wherever we can. The new romances are trivial trash. But trivial trash, as well as great literature, carries content messages. As educators, we must find ways to give young people alternative messages to patriarchal pap—messages which may help a new generation to defeat patriarchal power.

If there is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come, an idea that makes money must run a close second in the power sweepstakes. Saleability is certainly a key factor in the newest fad (phenomenon, if you will) in children's books—series romances. As noted in this issue, the success of the *Wildfire* romances has spawned a host of others—and sales are fantastic. First sold only through school book clubs, the romances are now being sold in bookstores with considerable fanfare and promotion.

But it's not just saleability that accounts for the success of these books. Apparently marketability is reinforced by the power of an idea whose time has come again. They represent a backsliding, a regression to the most sexist messages of the 1940's and 1950's (and

### TO OUR READERS

We apologize for the lateness of this *Bulletin*. Staff involvement in the production of a new curriculum on the Ku Klux Klan (see page 32 and the inside back cover) has delayed the completion of this issue and will regrettably also cause some delay in the completion of the rest of the volumes in this calendar year. We regret any inconvenience that this causes.

they're not so hot in the racism department either). A new generation is now being subjected to the same nonsense—good looks and the right clothes are a girl's most important attributes, there is no need to take responsibility for your life because a man will do it for you, life "ends" (at sixteen years old, if you're really lucky) when you can walk off into the sunset with the perfect boyfriend.

And the messages about race are just as bad. Either there are no people of color in the world (hardly realistic, but not unlike the white myopia of the early '50's) or else they're super beings only too happy to support and counsel the white protagonists. (We suppose we should be grateful that the worst of the old racist stereotypes are not reappearing—at least no book we've read has a watermelon-eating mammy crooning to her charges.)

These books are, unfortunately, but one manifestation of the conservative, turn-back-the-clock attitudes gaining acceptance today. As conservatives seek to imprison women in the kitchen once again, what better propaganda than books that tell girls that that's the most desirable place to be (next to one's true love's arms, of course). Girls certainly shouldn't be worrying their pretty little heads about anything else—even if women's wages are still 59 per cent of what men make, even if their right to an abortion is in jeopardy, even if cutbacks in welfare, day care and health care will make women's lives increasingly difficult.

Given their content, we lament the sales of these books in any market place. What concerns us most, however, is the fact that these books are being sold in the schools, thereby giving them a validity they might not otherwise have. Because these romances are appealing, because they are avidly read, educators are misled into thinking that they are in some way "good" for children (i.e., young girls)—reading aids at best, escapist literature at worst. But as Elaine Wagner said about the *Wildfire* magazine (the same ideology in another format; see the last *Bulletin*), adults—and teachers in particular—must take some responsibility for what they give children to read. We can hardly imagine praising teachers who pushed drugs, even though students might welcome them. Series romances are no less seductive, no less addictive—and only somewhat less dangerous.



# The New Preteen and Teenage Romances— A Report to Educators and Parents Issued in Concert with the National Education Association

The popularity of the formula-written preteen and teenage romance series is alarming, and their distribution through the nation's schools is particularly distressing. This issue of the *Bulletin*, conceived in part as a Report to the Educators and Parents of the United States, is published in conjunction with the National Education Association (NEA), which shares our concern about the inferior literary quality of these books and the sexism and other biases they promote.

Like NEA, we question the private corporations' use of teachers as agents to promote, sell and distribute these wretched books.

David Darland of the NEA took part in the protest against the first of these romance series—the Wildfire books published by Scholastic Book Services (see page 30). It was as part of that protest that Dr. Darland made the statement which appears in the box below. The statement should go a long way to clear the air of the confusion that has for too long equated criticism and protest with censorship and book-burning. Educational organizations have been reluctant to criticize sexism and racism in children's books, a reluctance that we feel has been motivated by a fear of being labelled censors.

Teen romance series are nothing new; such formula-written books date back to the 19th century. What *is* new about them is that they are being marketed on a massive scale, with steep promotional budgets, TV advertising and commercial gimmicks that include a national beauty contest for twelve-year-old girls. It is the hard-sell aimed directly at children—further evidence that in book publishing today, it is not professional editors but the market analysts who call the shots. It is also evidence of the urgent need for teachers, librarians and parents to call a halt to this crass exploitation of children.

This issue of the *Bulletin* examines the four romance series currently being promoted in the nation's classrooms and book stores. Since teachers and librarians will want to focus

on the particular series distributed in their schools—and parents, on the books being sold to their children—we have analyzed the books by series and by club distributor. The first two articles analyze the series sold through Scholastic clubs (Wildfire and Wishing Star); the next two pieces analyze the series sold through the clubs owned by Xerox Education Publications (Sweet Dreams and First Love).

Next, the argument most frequently advanced to justify the sale of the romance books in schools—to wit, that they will turn girls on to reading—is commented on by a reading specialist, by a librarian and by a feminist children's book editor. These pieces are followed by an article suggesting an antidote to the formula-written romances: books of literary quality about friendships between girls and boys—books recommended by The Feminist Press.

A history of series for teenagers, accompanied by a bibliography, is included for those wishing to explore the phenomenon further. A separate article compares the teen series to the Harlequin adult romances.

Lastly, there is an account of the recent meeting with Scholastic book editors to protest the literary quality and biased content of their romance series. This meeting resulted in the formation of a coalition of local and national organizations dedicated to eliminating bias and to improving the quality of books distributed through the nation's schools. A statement calling on individuals and organizations to join this coalition completes our coverage.

In a future *Bulletin*, Part II of this Report will examine another aspect of our evaluation of teen romances: that the romance series books are a direct outgrowth of the trend in school book clubs away from quality literature and toward inferior "non-books." Part II will explore the various school book club operations and examine the content of their offerings in the areas of fiction (other than romance), sports, fact and puzzle books, TV and media tie-ins, and cartoon books.

**Educational organizations are disposed to be very cautious in dealing with published materials for fear of being accused of censorship which educators deplore. However, caution need not become a Catch-22 problem. Clearly educators must be the constructive critics of materials and literature for children and youth.**

**The idea that one book is as good as another, or that it doesn't make any difference what a child reads just as long as he or she reads something is pure sop.**  
—David Darland, Associate Director, Instruction and Professional Development,  
National Education Association



*The mass marketing of series romances for ten- to fourteen-year-olds is the publishing phenomenon of the decade*

## Here Come the Blockbusters— Teen Books Go Big Time

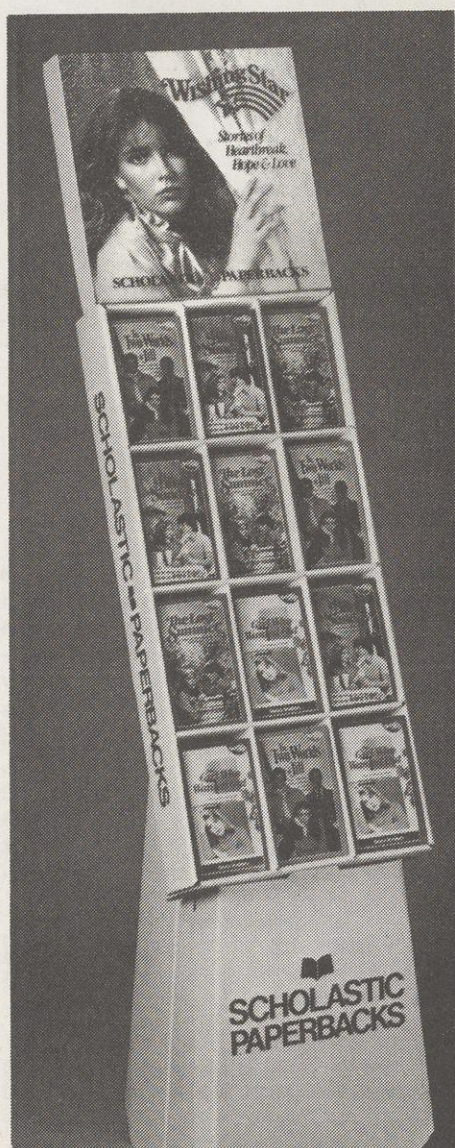
By Selma Lanes

The commercial success of preteen and teenage romance series is the publishing phenomenon of the decade. Sales are extraordinary. The average print run for a quality teen novel today is 7,500 copies, but these paperbacks are printed in first runs as high as 200,000 copies per title. Authors' agents report: "It is the only scene in juvenile publishing today."

How did such series come about? According to a *New York Times* article, it all began because booksellers became "uneasy" about the "hyper-realistic" books their teen-aged customers (read girls) were buying—books fraught with unwed pregnancies, abortions, divorce, drugs, homosexuality, venereal disease and incest. They communicated their distress to Scholastic's field representative, and Scholastic decided to do something about the situation.

According to the director of promotion at Scholastic Book Services, however, interest in romance books was sparked a little more than two years ago when the firm's market analysts noted that the fastest-selling titles in its school book clubs were those that featured first love relationships and that sold to girls between twelve and fifteen with a surprisingly large audience among ten and eleven year olds. If the books were selling so well, posed Scholastic market analysts, why not publish more like them? If they were doing so well in schools, why not also sell them in stores and supermarkets?

Still another source suggests that Scholastic noted a flagging interest in teenage "problem novels" by such writers as Judy Blume and Norma Klein and cast a longing eye at the sales figures for adult paperback romances and Gothic novels (notably the Harlequin titles distributed by Simon & Schuster)



*The Wishing Star series, reviewed on page 11, attempts to deal with "problems" but fails. Above, a Scholastic display piece for the series.*

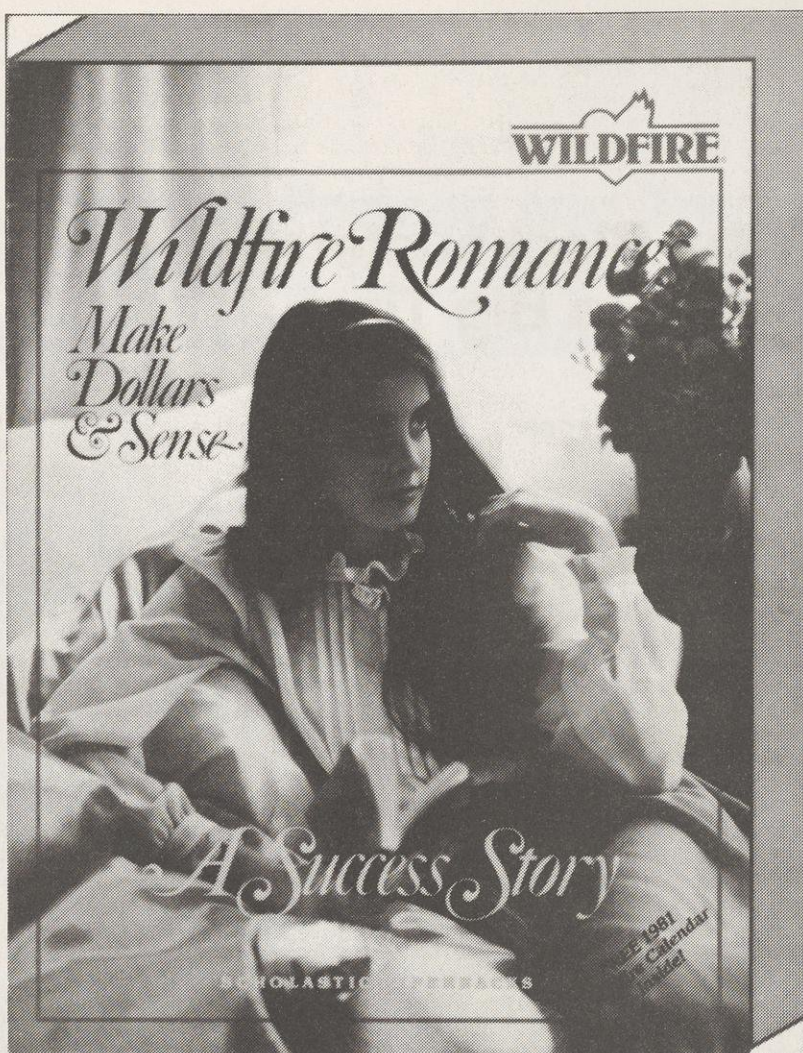
devoured in the millions by an audience comprised almost entirely of adult women. What about a similar line of romances for pubescent females?

In any case, the Wildfire imprint was born, first among the now proliferating paperback lines of teenage romances.

Both Scholastic and Wildfire's editor Ann Reit were a trifle queasy about the new product. For a juvenile publishing empire whose holier-than-thou credo has from the outset proclaimed it to be the purveyor of only the richest spiritual nourishment for the young, the Wildfires didn't quite fit the mold. True, Scholastic's tip-sheets for these formula-produced books, all of them about a high-school girl meeting a young Mr. Right, noted that anything beyond hugging or an occasional chaste kiss was strictly prohibited. Still and all, for a paperback line for bookstore chains and supermarkets, as well as the rich school book-club market administered by classroom teachers 'round the nation, it was, at the least, a new departure for Scholastic. In little more than a year, however, the venture has proved successful beyond its originators' wildest imaginings—to date, some 1,800,000 copies of 20 Wildfire titles have been devoured by their intended female audience. And though the Scholastic promotion speaks of the readership as teen-aged, it's a good bet that readers ten to twelve comprise the lion's share of the market.

Predictably, Wildfire's success led to immediate imitators. As of this past September, Bantam Books has hopped on the romance bandwagon with its own Sweet Dreams imprint for "teen-agers"; Simon & Schuster has just inaugurated its Silhouette First Love titles for the same market; and Grosset, Hearst and others are presently plan-





ning their own competitive products.

Harlequin, owned by a Canadian newspaper chain and considered to be the largest publisher in the world, last year sold 188 million adult romances around the world. It, too, is planning to enter the children's field. Harlequin vice-president Fred Kenner recently said: "We intend to develop a readership market to reach from the cradle to the grave." Book trade insiders say that Harlequin's international market research network will give that firm the edge in romance competition, and that Harlequin will soon dominate the preteen and teenage world market. (For the time being, however, the big three are Scholastic's Wildfire, Bantam's Sweet Dreams and Simon & Schuster's First Love.)

Even George Nicholson, editor of Dell's high-quality juvenile paperback lines of Yearling and Laurel Leaf reprints, admits to combing his prestigious backlist for the express purpose of plucking out such titles as Beverly

Cleary's *Fifteen* and Francine Pascal's *My First Love*, packaging them under a new Young Love imprint in order to take advantage of the new craze. Bookstores can then feature the quality backlist Dell Laurel Leafs in displays with the strictly "front-list" titles of Scholastic and others. (In the trade, front-list books are those whose life span extends no more than one or two large printings; they are designed not for the ages but for the selling moment.)

The series' chief merit, of course, from the publisher's viewpoint—and one by no means to be lightly dismissed in this era of waning hardcover book sales to older children—is that they sell. Many of Scholastic's first Wildfire titles, whose printings average 150,000 each, have become staples on the juvenile bookstore bestseller lists. So enthusiastic is Simon & Schuster about the expanding market's ultimate potential that they plan a first-year advertising budget of \$1,400,000 to intro-

duce the First Love line to nubile preteens. "We really have a commitment to these books," says Mona Altman of S & S's savvy marketing department in what may be the understatement of the year. Bantam, with an advertising budget "only" in the low six figures, plans to issue a newsletter to Sweet Dream fans. (Scholastic tried this route with a magazine called *Wildfire: Every Young Girl's Dream*, but met with so much opposition that it withdrew the periodical; see the last issue of the *Bulletin*.) And Caprice, the new line of teen romances by Grosset & Dunlap slated for next January, is setting in motion a nationwide cover-girl beauty contest as part of its promotion efforts!

At Franklin Watts, editor Jean Vestal, long an advocate of older children's books with high-interest level but limited vocabulary demands, feels the Scholastic/Bantam/Simon & Schuster contributions can only help the business. "Anything that has the likelihood of turning a non-reader into a book person—provided the content is not downright damaging—is okay with me. I look on these books as doing a kind of missionary work for us hard-cover publishers, making converts to reading. More power to them." Vestal's own line of Triumph books contains such titles as *Only Love*, a novel by Susanne Salas which sold some 12,000 copies in hard cover and is now a Laurel Leaf paperback.

At Xerox Education Corporation's book clubs (which sell Bantam's Sweet Dreams and Simon & Schuster's First Love series) editor Mary Verdic sees the new romances as only one ingredient in a rounded book program offering sports, biography, science fiction and works of high literary quality to both boys and girls of junior high age and up. Though the line tends to have a preponderance of zappy, TV tie-in titles lately, of the 35-37 titles offered to the school book clubs in each of four cycles during the school year, there are in the present cycle only three teen-aged romances and Verdic sees no likelihood of the proportion increasing beyond a half dozen, no matter how great their popularity with girls. [Since this interview was conducted, time, alas, has brought some changes. The current Read club mailing contains eight romances—with three featured on the cover of the leaflet students receive. The cover of the teacher's material features five books—four of them romances.—Ed.] Frankly acknowledging that these romances "are not great literature or



even very mind-broadening," she has thus far encountered no complaints either from teachers or parents concerning the appropriateness of offering the new genre through the schools, with that tacit implication of their having some educational value. "Let's face it," she says, "there's a place for such books in any general offering of works for older children. Just as we were early backers of Judy Blume—we even created a special book club just for her titles—we make it a point to offer what children seem to be enjoying." (For another Xerox perspective, see page 17).

Marjorie Jones, chief editor of the Junior Literary Guild, has an opposite viewpoint. "Our hardcover book club serves schools and libraries. We have a responsibility to provide the best titles in all age groups that publishers are offering in a given season. We're depended upon for our literary judgment. We wouldn't dream of compromising it just because kids are reading these romances in depressing droves."

The school book clubs are an interesting aspect of the romance phenomenon. The clubs ostensibly provide school children with quality literature for recreational reading—inexpensive, good paperbacks that children can buy for themselves. When Scholastic introduced book clubs into the nation's schools 30 years ago—to be followed by Xerox 20 years later, an attempt was made to give students what are called "stretch books" (classics, biographies and good fiction and non-fiction) balanced off by "relaxers" or "non-books" (sports, romance, joke books, comic books). In recent years the number of relaxers or non-books has increased, while stretchers have markedly fallen off. This trend has been encouraged or at least accelerated by the economics of book publishing. To keep unit costs down and the price within reach of children, the print runs have had to be steadily increased. Selection policies have been hit, and the less challenging books—the relaxers and non-books, particularly those with TV and movie tie-ins—have been given increased visibility. Considering the popularity of the romance series to date, we can expect that they too will receive extensive promotion by the clubs. □

#### About the Author

*SELMA LANES, author of the best-selling The Art of Maurice Sendak (Abrams) and other works, is a critic of children's books.*

## Reactions to the Romance Series

As a parent and educator I find it appalling that school book clubs are distributing materials for elementary age girls and boys which place a false emphasis on clothes, popularity and the pursuit of the opposite sex.

As Executive Secretary of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association, I will bring this matter to the attention of the elected leadership of our Association, and it is my hope that our Association will take a formal position on it. I would like to see us "spread the word" to all of our more than 1600 principals across Michigan.—William Mays, Jr., Executive Secretary, Michigan Elementary and Middle Schools Principals Association

The Wildfire, Sweet Dreams and other romance books represent a return to the view that the proper function of women is to be decorative and servile pieces in the lives of men—in short, to live life vicariously. It is the exact replica of the "feminine mystique" that Betty Friedan described in the 1960's. The big difference is that the public schools are being viewed as the vendors of the new pap. Teachers and librarians, beware.—Mary L. Spencer, Ph.D., National Chair, Education Discrimination Committee, National Organization for Women (NOW)

The series romances do a disservice not only to minorities and females, but to males also. It locks them into a macho image where they must be all-knowing, all-powerful, ever in control and perennially elusive. The human spirit dies under those conditions.

Since these books are achieving what we feel is their primary goal—to make big bucks for the publishers—it is unlikely that they will be withdrawn from the marketplace. But if there is enough pressure brought to bear, the publishers can at least be stopped from hawking their wares through the classroom teacher. The National Congress of Neighborhood Women adds its voice to those who protest this travesty.—Jan Peterson, Executive Director, National Congress of Neighborhood Women

The romance series is one more vehicle for severely constricting the lives of young women. There is no comparable vehicle for constricting the lives of young men that is sanctioned by school authorities. Unequal treatment on the basis of sex may be a constitutional issue here, since these restrictive books are directed only to young women.—Donnarae MacCann, contributor to *The Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature*

I can see why kids my age are carried along by the fast storyline. But there isn't anything at all of substance to them. They are about a narrow, little world, and the plots are awfully contrived. You know when you're reading a real piece of literature; you're aware of the richness of the writing. Not so with these books.—Ruth Bond

I feel distressed at the potential role models being presented to young readers through the school book clubs. I will recommend that our Commission look into the selection of books being offered by these clubs.—Dimples Armstrong, Chairperson, Human Relations Commission, Connecticut Education Association

While we've been working to expand choices for girls and boys, these books are working to turn back the clock. The limited roles for females presented in these books reinforce the limits both in options and opportunities for young women when they must enter the work force.—Elizabeth H. Giese, State Director, Michigan Title IX Community Program

It is no coincidence that this series comes at a time when librarians are being pressured to remove books by Kurt Vonnegut and J.D. Salinger, and, of course, Judy Blume from their shelves. The Wildfire series could have been invented by the Moral Majority as an antidote to the dreaded concept of "values clarification." The values embodied in the series are consonant with all the fundamentalist principles of the Family Protection Act.—Brett Harvey, writer and former editor at The Feminist Press



## Wildfire: Tame But Deadly

By Brett Harvey

Christy Jamison, sixteen years old, lives in a small, suburban community. Her parents are warm, loving, responsive, yet clear and strict in their expectations of Christy. They are never inconsistent. Christy loves and respects them. She is responsible and cooperative at home, doing her chores promptly and helping out without being asked. She attends the local high school, works hard and has lots of friends. None of the students at her high school has ever taken drugs. No one at Christy's high school has ever heard of anyone who has ever taken drugs. No girl at Christy's high school has ever gotten pregnant, because none of the students has ever done more than kiss. All the students at Christy's high school are white. All the people in Christy's town are white. The parents of all the students are happily married. There are no single-parent families in the entire town. No one in the town knows what the word "homosexuality" means.

The reader is by now muttering that there is no such place, no such people. But there are. This is the unreal and homogenized world of a new series of "teen romances" published by Scholastic Book Services, a division of Scholastic Magazine, Inc. Aimed at twelve- to fifteen-year-old girls and priced at \$1.50, the books bear such titles as *Love Comes to Anne*, *Dreams Can Come True* and *Just Sixteen*. On the photographic covers, impossibly clear-skinned boys and girls—obviously teen models—smile at each other. The series is called *Wildfire Romances*—a name which, if oddly inappropriate for such tame books, has turned out to be prophetic, as they have indeed sold like "wildfire": over 1.8 million copies since the first book appeared in 1980.

Just how pernicious are the *Wildfire Romances*? Are they anything more than the harmless pap, the silly, escapist nonsense teenagers have read in the past? Not really. The difference—and the problem—lies in the purveyors of this mate-

rial. Unlike the garbage we picked up off the drugstore rack and hid from our parents, these books come from a respected publisher long established in the schools; a publisher in the privileged position of being one of the very few whose books are actually ordered from *within* the schools. Teachers hand out the order forms to their students, who bring them home to fill out. And the *Wildfire Romances* are, of course, on those order forms. Because of Scholastic's reputation as a source of "good" books, and because, after all, the order forms come from the school, parents assume the materials are, if not downright educational, at least acceptable to the educational community. Let's examine what these books teach the twelve- to fifteen-year-olds who are their target audience.

To begin with, the world of the *Wildfire* books is immutably middle-class to upper-middle-class. Every family except one lives in a solid house on a pleasant street with a lawn or yard, in a small town or semi-rural area. The one exception occurs in *Dreams Can Come True*, in which the widowed mother and daughter live in an apartment. The family in *Suzy Who?*, however, lives in an elaborate home which includes a decorator-designed indoor garden and a studio in which Suzy's father, a doctor, sculpts in his spare time. (Suzy has had ballet lessons, violin lessons, skiing lessons and horseback riding lessons.) At the other end of this extremely narrow spectrum is the family in *Just Sixteen*, in which the mother reluctantly goes to work because—and only because—the father has had a disabling accident. Some of the families have to practice a few little economies, but money can always be found for a pair of designer jeans or a "costly" prom dress.

The *Wildfire* world is overwhelmingly white. A Hispanic man appears in *Suzy Who?*; he is the caretaker of an animal shelter, a "short, heavy-set man," who says things like, "Watch out for thees one . . . theese German shepherd, some-

thing happen, he can be mean." The only Black people in the entire series appear in *Dreams Can Come True*, in which there is at least a nodding reference to racism. The first person Ellynnne, the central character, meets at her new school is Willie Evans—tall, beautiful, brilliant, confident, head cheerleader and the second most popular girl in the school. Willie Evans is worth taking a closer look at because, in fact, she is a major character in the novel. Although there is no indication that Ellynnne has ever encountered a Black person before in her life, she and Willie slide instantly and effortlessly into being "best friends." Of course, Ellynnne is "shocked and startled" by the way Willie's home is decorated: "the brilliantly colored living room," "their splashy uses of reds, oranges, and yellows," Willie's "brilliant orange and yellow bedroom with the zebra-striped rug and black and white checked bedspread." (Interestingly, 20 pages later, we find Ellynnne in Willie's room, plucking "at the fuzzy zebra-striped bedspread.")

Although Redondo Beach, the setting for the novel, is a suburb which actually contains Blacks of all classes, Willie doesn't seem to have any Black friends. Her boyfriend is in college 500 miles away, conveniently precluding any on-stage love scenes.

Willie proves to be a kind of role model for Ellynnne in the latter's desperate quest for popularity, epitomized by winning a place on the cheerleading team. Willie offers advice based on her own experience as part of a tiny racial minority at school:

"Can't crumple, Kiddo. If you crumple, they'll keep right at you. You got to learn to be brazen . . . that's female for brave."

In addition, Willie Helps Ellynnne out by working a little "voodoo" on her rival in love!

At one point, her friendship with Willie does create a tiny moral dilemma for Ellynnne. Ellynnne has been invited to a party at the home of Merri Merriweather



(the *first* most popular girl in school); Willie, who has also been invited, will not go because "They're always *extra* nice. Mrs. Merriweather always makes a point of telling me how *happy* she is that I could come and how *wonderful* she thinks it is that Merri and I are friends." At first, Ellynne's loyalty to Willie prompts her not to go herself. On the other hand, at Merri's party, she will meet all the most popular kids at school, particularly Kip Russell, a boy on whom she has a crush. Willie's response is, "Merri's got something you want. Go get it, Kid-do." Ellynne's mother concurs, reassuring Ellynne that "Willie knows she can take care of herself." The problem is thus neatly side-stepped and Ellynne goes on to "the important decisions, like what do I wear?"

### A Realistic Moment

Ellynne's chief competition for the spot on the cheerleading team is Marsha, seemingly the only Black student other than Willie at the school. In perhaps the only realistic moment in the entire *Wildfire* series, Willie says of the school, "They'll have one black chick on the team but never two. Two would be a majority. Heaven forbid." However, miraculously, Marsha wins after all and everybody goes into a spectacular display of heroic sportsmanship: Willie cheers for Marsha but promptly bursts into tears for Ellynne; Marsha reassures Willie; Ellynne immediately congratulates Marsha warmly and gamely suggests they all go for Cokes. Thus, although there is an *attempt* in *Dreams* to show that Black people are "no different from you and me" (except for those zebra-skin rugs), even that liberal idea is marred by unconscious racism and distorted by the implausible and unrealistic *niceness* that pervades the novel.

### Dated Messages to Girls

If the series' message about Blacks is that they don't exist, *Wildfire's* message to girls is crystal clear and straight out of the 1950's. At the core of every single book except one is the issue of getting and keeping a boyfriend. The exception, *That's My Girl*, almost proves the rule because its heroine is a figure-skater working to make the Olympics. Her single-minded devotion to ice-skating sets her apart, making her almost exotic and not as "identifiable-with" as the rest of the protagonists.

The pursuit of the boyfriend involves a

dazzling array of sexist stereotypes. For one thing, girls do not call boys that they are interested in. Ever. The mother in *I'm Christy* firmly states, "It isn't smart for a girl to chase after a boy, Christy. I don't know what's happened to Mike, but I think you ought to wait and let him come to you." The girls wait, worry and anguish, but they never pick up the phone.

### Female Rivalry

The major obstacles to be surmounted in the search for the boyfriend are, of course, other girls. Rivalry between girls is an important theme. Female rivalry reaches a fever pitch in *Superflirt* (the heroine is a pathological "flirter" who "steals" all her friends' boyfriends) and in *Beautiful Girl* (the heroine is so beautiful all the girls distrust her). On the other hand, although friendships between girls exist, in only two books in the series are these friendships important enough to be focused on. In fact, in *Suzy Who?*, Suzy's long-standing friendships with two frumpy and unpopular girls are seen as obstacles to her social success. Her mother spends most of the novel urging Suzy to drop them. True, Suzy resists, deciding instead to try to help them become more popular, but there is the subtle implication in the novel that the mother's fears are justified.

Brains would seem to be another ob-

stacle. When a boy inquires about a library book one heroine has dropped, she denies having read it, pretends she "has" to read it "for a report," and hides her other library books: "The last thing she needed as a new student in the school was a reputation as a bookworm." In *Suzy Who?*, the heroine loves math and is a whizz at it. But she says:

It was not a great gift nor the one she would have chosen. . . . Most likely Peter Gilbert would not be impressed by a girl . . . whose sole ability was math. It was hard to imagine him saying, "I just love the way you solved that geometry problem, Suzy."

And what are the *Wildfire* mothers like as role models? Only five of the 17 work outside the home: one is a teacher, one a bookstore owner, one a realtor, one a legal secretary, one a lawyer. However, their jobs are clearly peripheral to their *real* work (being mothers) and usually only alluded to once at the beginning of the novel. All the mothers seem to be magnificent cooks, skilled at sewing and talented decorators. They are never too tired to whip up a batch of brownies, create a Halloween costume at a moment's notice or single-handedly re-decorate a daughter's room. They're always leaving delicious casseroles for the children to heat up if they're going to be out for dinner.

There are two interesting exceptions: the only two single mothers in the series. In *Summer of the Sky-Blue Bikini* (the

As I reviewed the romance series, I found myself swept back to when I grew up on *True Story* magazine. The message remains unchanged—females who are truly deserving will be rewarded by *getting the man*! "Unworthy" women are always denied this bliss.

Another similarity between these new books and the *True Story* genre is the absence of minority characters. As a youngster, I devoured the stories but never saw myself, for not only was I a Black teenager, I was intelligent, creative, assertive, nearly six feet tall and a leader. None of these qualities was incorporated into the romance stories then, and they are rarely included now.

I remember the pain of my invisibility. I recall thinking that there was something wrong with me; that I must actively hide my strengths if I were ever to achieve that ultimate condition—to be part of a pair! It took two decades and years of therapy for me to initiate a recovery from this assault.

I am now blessed with a granddaughter who is also Black, tall for her young age, bright and active. I am determined that she not internalize the same garbage I did.

Since the major difference between my granddaughter's situation and mine is that *True Story* was not hustled in the classroom (I had, in fact, to sneak to read it), and since she will obviously have access to this material, I have decided to handle it as negative role modeling. I will discuss the storylines, examine their credibility with her—and trust that her good sense will prevail.

I will also commit myself to aiding any organized protest against these sexist, racist, classist, insulting publications.—Ashley Pennington



only book in the series I would actually recommend, in spite of its silly title), the father "just sort of dropped off the face of the earth twelve years ago." The mother put herself through law school and is about to become a junior partner in a law firm. Her work is important to her, is frequently mentioned and is taken seriously by her two daughters.

### A Disturbing Exception

The other exception is more disturbing. Judith Aleese in *Dreams Can Come True* is a young widow who is going to law school. However, it is men who seem to have shaped her life to a great extent: her deceased husband, who "helped me see who I was and what I should be doing with my life," and her brother, who has assured her of a place in his law firm as soon as she passes the bar.

Judith has difficulty sympathizing with her daughter Ellynne's intense desire to be popular and to make the cheerleading team. Here is a typical exchange:

Mother: Ellie, I don't know what's the matter with you. You've become so frivolous and artificial.

Ellynne: I want to be popular, Mother. Is

that so hard for you to understand? Believe me, it's important.

The trouble here is that the author is clearly on the side of the daughter. After another exchange in which her mother has criticized Ellynne for being too concerned with clothes,

Ellynne looked at her mother and noted that [she] was wearing the same navy blazer and blue checked slacks that she'd had on yesterday. She hadn't put any lipstick on since she started out at ten in the morning. Her mother was so interested in her studies that she seldom bothered with how she looked any more. Privately, Ellynne thought that her mother was carrying things a bit too far.

And there are other references to her mother's "straight hair pulled back into a bun," and the fact that "overwork" is causing "little lines . . . around the corners of [her] eyes and mouth." There's also the implication that Judith doesn't spend the time she should with her daughter because of "that dumb old law school." Of course, this being the Wildfire world, the mother does ultimately come through and sheds tears of sympathy when Ellynne loses the cheerleading competition. But the message is clear. *This* mother, who cares only about

law school, is a drab drudge who neglects and misunderstands her daughter. Ellynne's values—being pretty, wearing the right clothes, being popular, and, above all, getting a boyfriend—are subtly reinforced. Judith, significantly one of only two mothers in the series whose work outside the home is important to her, is subtly criticized and put down.

### Appearance Emphasized

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Wildfire books is their overwhelming emphasis on physical appearance. "Good looks" are essential; dressing right is crucial. In fact, the novels are crammed with descriptions of idealized faces, makeup and wardrobes.

The Wildfire books present a world untouched by any of the grim realities many teenagers face. Teen-age pregnancy is not an issue here because no one EVER does, or is heard to do, more than kiss. And it's the boys who always "gently but knowingly" draw back. Their voices get "rough" or "brusque" and they say things like "I—uh—guess we'd better go in now" or "Time to start for home." There is not a whisper of a drug. In *Just Sixteen*, the heroine drinks a half a glass of wine, doesn't tell her parents, and feels so guilty she never does it again. In another book, some friends of the heroine drink beer at home in their parents' absence and she wonders, sanctimoniously, "if Karen and David's freedom was the result of earned responsibility or a mere lack of concern on their parents' part."

The real power of the Wildfire books is that they purport to depict the real lives and problems of U.S. teenagers. Playing on the insecurities and self-doubts which plague most teen-aged girls, the Wildfire romances come just close enough to real life to be convincing to young readers. But implicit in these hygienic stories are the old, damaging and limiting stereotypes from which we've struggled so hard to free ourselves and our children: that the real world is white and middle-class; that motherhood is women's only work; that a man is the ultimate prize and a woman is incomplete without one; and that in the battle for that prize, the weapons are good looks and charm, intelligence is a liability, and the enemy is other women. □

### About the Author

BRETT HARVEY, a free-lance writer, was formerly with *The Feminist Press*.

## An Interview with a Scholastic Editor

I attempted to make an appointment with Ann Reit, editor of Scholastic's Teen Age Book Clubs, to talk with her about the Wildfire series. She declined to be interviewed in person, saying that the Council on Interracial Books for Children had been critical of Scholastic and that she was too busy. She suggested that I send her my questions in writing and she would answer them by mail. I sent her a list of questions on August 6 and received her reply a month later on September 12. In general, her responses were brief and predictable, but the answers to the last two questions are interesting; the questions and answers follow.

**Q.** *Is the fact that the Wildfire books deal predominantly with white, middle-class families an accident or the result of the perceived audience for the series?*

**A.** We feel that the largest part of our audience is white, middle-class and therefore the characters in the books are ones that the readers will make the closest identification with. However, the book that is the Wildfire book for March will deal with two couples, one white and one Black.

**Q.** *How do you feel the series deals with the roles of women and girls in this country?*

**A.** I feel that the Wildfire books treat the roles of middle-class middle-American women and teenage girls realistically. We accept the fact that most teenage girls are normally and healthily interested in boys. It is a truth that is universal, going from the most primitive cultures to the most sophisticated. Along with their desire to have a boy-girl relationship, some girls in these novels also intend to go on to college and they have strong ideas as to what interests them in terms of a career. Adult female roles range from mothers who are working and are heads of a single-parent family to women in two-parent families who have chosen the homemaker role. In addition, adult female characters are portrayed in a variety of careers, such as: doctor; editor; law student; nurse; gift-book store owner; artist; writer, etc.—B.H.



*A new series purports to deal with real problems; our reviewer's verdict: double trouble*

## Wishing Star: Hiding Trash with a Veneer of "Reality"

By Emily Strauss Watson

The Wishing Star series would appear to be Scholastic's response to criticism of their Wildfire romances (see p. 8). Instead of being totally focused on boy-catching like the Wildfire books, the Wishing Star titles attempt to deal with such specific "problems" as teenage alcoholism, joint custody, blindness and paraplegia.

The Wishing Star plots do not seem written to formula, but several themes are common. All the protagonists come from upper middle- and middle-class backgrounds, all are pretty and bright and all, because of a quirk of fate, have to face and overcome a problem.

It is because of this focus on "problems"—particularly disabilities—that input from Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York was sought. A primary focus of this analysis was to determine whether or not the authors succeeded in providing accurate, non-stereotypic information about the lives of teenagers with various problems, particularly physical disabilities. Would the books help children understand and deal with different situations and people? How would they affect the self-image of young people with disabilities or other "problems"? (Because of the exploding popularity of teenage romances, the Wishing Star books, which deal with purportedly realistic "problem" situations, are particularly significant.) An analysis of the four titles published to date follows.

*The Lost Summer* deals with teenage alcoholism. Susie, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, is best friends with La Dawn, the only Black ("chocolate colored") girl on Susie's block, and Pam, the innocent blond (white, needless to say) whose waking hours are spent fretting over two things—boys and clothing. La Dawn, who is the envy of all for having the "cutest button nose," is dating a "dream," a boy from the only other Black family on their street. Susie, however, has other things on her

mind, like her dislike of her new stepfather, the fun she'll have at the next party in the park, and, most important, her next drink. Susie's rationale for drinking is that this is her way to "come to life with the same old excitement, laughing and dancing, at ease with herself as she always was after a few drinks. It was such a pleasant feeling, as if she were the prettiest, most popular girl there. . . ."

School over, Susie finally gets a job at a fast food place. The shop is hot and the atmosphere uncomfortable. Soon, Susie's life is so unbearable that she cannot survive more than two hours without a drink. Her lifelines to survival become a bottle of vodka hidden in the bathroom at home, a thermos taken to work and a boss who likes to keep his employees happy, especially if they are young, pretty and female. When Monrovia, La Dawn's kid brother whom Susie adores, finds Susie lying drunk in the park, Susie has a fight with La Dawn but doesn't change her drinking habits.

After the final party of the summer, Susie's world finally turns into a nightmare when she wakes up the next morning to discover that Pam has been rushed to a hospital in a coma because some of Susie's "friends" had spiked Pam's fruit juice drinks and then tricked her into taking pills. Guilty and contrite, Susie confronts her parents with her problem. The book ends with Susie headed for an alcoholic rehabilitation center, a new romance in the offing, her friendship with La Dawn restored and her relationship with her mother and stepfather now wrinkle-free.

*The Two Worlds of Jill* tells of Jill's attempts to juggle the joint custody arrangement that has followed her parents' divorce. Living one month with each parent, Jill finds herself having to adjust to two quite different lifestyles. Jill's mother is an artist living in Soho.

Her lifestyle is casual and Jill is treated as an equal, although sometimes too much so for Jill's taste. Jill's father, on the other hand, treats her as "Daddy's Little Girl" and has her room in his Upper East Side apartment decorated in pink and white ruffles. At one point, Jill's father becomes quite angry at her for having had her ears pierced without his permission (his only consolation is that Jill is wearing small earrings!). Jill attends a private school and her friends unquestioningly accept her once-a-month-change of lifestyle, which includes her dragging a suitcase to school as she shuttles from one home to the other.

At school, Jill has her share of special friends and teachers. There's Mrs. Winslow, her homeroom teacher, "a roly-poly woman who wore horn-rimmed glasses over black button eyes," or Mrs. Gabriel, "a little gray-haired lady who . . . looked more like somebody's grandmother than a phys. ed. teacher." Jill's favorite teacher is Mrs. Carson, a widow with two children who "came to this country three years ago because she believed the opportunities for herself and her children were greater here than in Belize, *even though she was black*" (emphasis added). Jill's friends include Sandy, who is more concerned about the attention she gets from her male peers than her grades, and Maggie, an all-American teenage version of Dear Abby.

As a typical teenage girl, Jill has an avid interest in boys, and of course, has no difficulty in attracting *two* young men. The only problem is that Jason and Paul represent two different aspects of her life, which appear increasingly unreconcilable. Finally, the crunch is on. Christmas vacation is at hand and Jill must decide between going skiing with her friends in Vermont or pleasing just one of her parents. Will joint custody tear Jill apart? In the end a miraculous solution appears on the



horizon to resolve conflicts and give the book the requisite happy ending.

*Blind Sunday* is the best book of the lot—and the only one not first published by Scholastic. (It was apparently originally a TV screen play.) Jeff is a painfully shy teenager who is barely able to keep a conversation going beyond simple yes-no responses. He meets Lee, a pretty (of course) girl who quickly puts him at ease. Suddenly, Jeff realizes that Lee cannot see, but by now his interest has been aroused. Jeff follows Lee and soon learns how she gets about and very ably manages her everyday life. Lee is shown as very competent and independent, occasionally to the extreme of obnoxious stubbornness. She is also sensitive to the impact of her blindness on her relationships with others. However, despite some good intentions, the author falls into the handicapist trap of overcompensation, describing Lee as “more cheerful than most, but she had to be, to keep everybody from getting uptight around her.” Lee also seems to be prejudiced about other people with disabilities; she leaves the bus seats reserved for the handicapped free for “someone else [who] might need them.”

Jeff tries to better understand Lee's world by blindfolding himself. While this technique is often used by parents and teachers of visually impaired children and adults, Jeff's unsupervised ploy—in which he easily hops a cab while blindfolded—leaves the reader with no real grasp of the lives of people with visual impairments. (It is also unrealistic to portray Lee as “passing” as a sighted person for an entire evening at a big school dance.) *Blind Sunday* may be a step in the right direction of helping children understand visual impairments, but it is only a small one.

In *The Girl Who Wanted Out*, the reader meets Andie who, paralyzed as a result of an auto accident, must now learn to live seated in a wheelchair. Her room, still on the second floor of her home, has been newly decorated by her mother, who “smiles courageously at her hopelessly crippled daughter.” Andie's mom has also been thoughtful enough to provide a little bell on Andie's bedside table so that Andie can summon the attendant who has been hired to answer her every beck and call. Although Andie is reluctant to leave her comfortable environment, she is soon bored and realizes that she needs to escape her “jail,” no easy feat with “dead legs.”

Finally, Andie agrees to go to a rehabilitation center. Andie's first glimpse

of some of the people there shocks her, but she is quickly reassured by a receptionist who tells her, “This floor is for spastics and stroke cases. . . . You're on the third floor, amputees and paraplegics. It's nice there.” Eventually, Andie “adjusts” and leaves the center with more independence and new friends, including Sammy, a “nice, clean old man.”

Andie's room at home has now been moved to the first floor, but Andie is still trapped by the steps and narrow doorways of the “outside world.” Finishing her schoolwork through home instruction, Andie is bullied into attending graduation and sitting through a typical “hooray for the poor crip” scene in which she is voted most likely to succeed. During this period, Andie is also befriended by the rich stepmother of the teenage drunken driver who caused the accident in which Andie was hurt. Her “fairy godmother,” who had previously arranged for Andie's swift admission to the rehab center, now places her chauffeur-driven Bentley at Andie's disposal. While these outings offer temporary escapes, they do not give Andie true independence. When Joe, Andie's brother, decides to take her to visit his college, they find themselves subjected to the indignities of a barrier-filled world, but the author's treatment of this reality leaves much to be desired. (When Joe and Andie's flight lands, Joe “waited until the passengers had left, then picked up his burden [Andie] and staggered off the plane.”) At the university, Andie finds a barrier-free dorm complete with “some of her own kind.” She flies home to decide her uncertain future. The author's messages are certainly clearer than Andie's future—pity the poor crips; they function best in their own world and, more subtly, let's keep them out of ours. Hardly a helpful message for young readers with disabilities!

### Tameness Is Only Skin-Deep

As with the Wildfire series, the Wishing Star books seem tame enough—but only on the surface. On closer examination, they represent a genre of destructive teenage literature. The books present fantasies, easy solutions to difficult problems in worlds that do not exist. These Wishing Star books portray rosy-colored, stereotypic environments which clearly indicate that the authors do not speak from personal experience and hence cannot offer real insight into the problems and solutions

they write about. The authors also treat each of the protagonists' problems as unique isolated incidents, rather than the socially created problems that they are.

The books' depiction of minorities is just as unrealistic. Black names such as La Dawn, Monrovia and Valandia exist only in the minds of cloistered, sheltered white writers. And how convenient—in the interests of integration—to have two Black families on your street *and* to have each family contribute one member of a perfect romantic match.

As in the other romances, considerable time is spent carefully describing the physical attributes (all positive, of course) and attire of the protagonists and their friends. Half-hearted stabs are made at breaking through stereotypic occupational roles, but Susie is still content to settle for becoming a nurse instead of a doctor. Other stereotypes appear. In one book, a mother is even described as coming to brunch (the only meal her husband ever prepares) dressed as a “princess.” Pam's older parents are put down as “embarrassed” at having “had a baby after a certain age.” Maggie's mother wants her daughter to “have fun” and see less of her poor-but-hard-working “O.A.O.” (One And Only).

Although three of the four mothers work, they hardly provide positive role models because their work (nurse, artist, real estate agent) is not given serious recognition. One plus is that the books make it clear that some women work because of economic necessity—the reality for most working women today. On the other hand, disabled women in particular need to be encouraged to think creatively and seriously about career choices, and these books will certainly not accomplish that. (And of course there is no indication that the young protagonists are giving much thought to their own career choices.)

The evidence is clear and the verdict must be guilty. By attempting to pawn off its distorted version of “harsh” reality, Scholastic Book Services has done a major disservice to the schools that sell these books and the students who read them. Its Wishing Star series spells only double trouble for the teenagers who are fooled into thinking the books offer helpful insights into reality. □

### About the Author

EMILY STRAUSS WATSON is a board member of Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York.



*Bantam offers yet another series populated by middle-class white girls obsessed with clothes, makeup, being popular and attracting boys*

## Sweet Dreams: Virtue Rewarded with the Right Boy

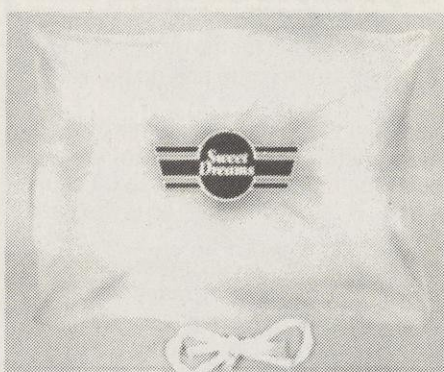
By Brett Harvey

Bantam Books has launched its own contribution to the teen romance genre this September with the Sweet Dreams series. The first six titles are already in print and, beginning in November, two new titles will be published every month. Bantam's press release states the series "deals with real daily situations that young people face . . . dating, first love, sibling rivalry, shyness, jealousy and friendship."

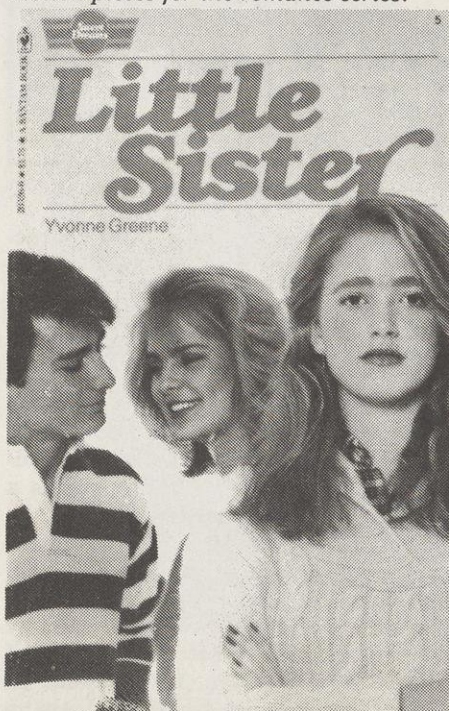
The Sweet Dreams novels are slightly shorter than the Wildfire books, and the quality of the writing a little poorer, but basically the two series are identical. The world is still populated exclusively by squeaky-clean, white, middle-class youngsters obsessed with clothes, makeup, being popular and attracting boys. Other girls are still potential rivals, all-out competitors or, more rarely, allies in the popularity race. The mother's work is either non-existent (except for those mountains of brownies) or negligible.

Only three of the first six novels concern any aspect of the protagonist's personality beyond her looks and her ability to attract a steady boyfriend: *California Girl* (the main character is a pre-Olympic swimmer); *Laurie's Song* (the protagonist is a poet); and *P.S. I Love You* (the protagonist writes gothic romances).

Jennie, in *California Girl*, has moved to Texas with her family in order to keep working with her swimming coach who has been transferred there. She falls in love with Mark, an ex-high school football star who has been disabled by an injury. Although Jennie has been doing poorly in her swimming training since she arrived in Texas, Mark's unexpected appearance at the pool inspires her to swim well. ("I wanted Mark to see me at



*Bantam's Sweet Dreams, the first Wildfire imitator, is being distributed in schools by Xerox. The pillow-shaped folder above is typical of the lavish promotion pieces for the romance series.*



my best, so I did every set flat out.")

Jennie becomes absorbed in "helping" Mark to rehabilitate his leg, and encouraging his artistic talent. The climactic scene of the novel takes place back in California, where Jennie has traveled with her coach for an important swimming meet. She spends hours obsessively calling Mark back in Texas, and when he doesn't answer, she is desolate. But, lo and behold, Mark isn't home because he is en route to California to see her swim in the meet. His presence in the bleachers restores Jennie's interest in swimming: "Mark had come all this way to watch me swim and I was not going to let him down." So much for inner resources!

Laurie of *Laurie's Song* is a poet who falls in love with Skip, a rock-and-roll singer; in order to win him, she turns her talent to writing lyrics for his tunes. Now, *Laurie's Song* is actually a cautionary tale in which Laurie learns to be true to herself and comes to choose the hard-working, serious Jeff over the more superficial Skip. But at the end of the novel, even as she pulls herself together and makes the honor roll, the implication is that she's doing it mainly to win Jeff's approval. As Laurie says of her best friend, Didi, "How could Didi be depressed about not making the honor roll when she had a boy who cared about her so much?"

Mariah Johnson, the gothic romance writer of *P.S. I Love You*, falls in love with wealthy Paul Strobe, who is dying of cancer. He urges her to write about herself and her life, but the novel—an unbearably cloying tear-jerker—is really about her relationship with Paul. At the end, after Paul's death, her mother gives her a new typewriter, and Mariah



As an adult lesbian, looking back on the romance novels I read as a young girl, I am horrified at the years that were lost because I bought the message that sooner or later I would give up my girlfriends and find a man who would take me away and make me happy. As a preadolescent and teenager, I read compulsively and non-discriminately. Along with such novels as *Wuthering Heights* and *The Bad Seed*, I devoured romance novels with such titles as *Summer Love* and *April Love*.

I learned from these books that romance with a man would be a necessity in achieving adulthood, and that passion was always to be directed at the opposite sex. I also learned that this all-consuming passion-to-be would blind me to any other needs or relationships.

What was so insidious about these messages was that they prevented me from recognizing the profound and inherent value in the kind of love I already felt for members of my own sex. When I found myself melancholy because a female friend had hurt me, I assumed there must be a male-related cause for my sadness. When I found myself painfully jealous that a girlfriend had found a boy to spend her time with, I assumed I must be jealous because I wanted a boyfriend.

Although I did, in actuality, spend all of my priority time and energy with members of my own sex, I also looked for boys to have crushes on, not understanding (or being allowed to understand) that my feelings for girls were the real crushes, and, in some cases, love. Many of these crushes on boys (often week-long at the most) were, in retrospect, attempts to burn off the love energy I felt for my girlfriends. I remember saying to one of them, "Funny how the boyfriends come and go but we always stay together."

No romance novel ever gave me the slightest hint that girls (and women) could, and did, stay together. Although I did discover (thankfully by age nineteen) that the term "in love" could be applied to my feelings for members of my own sex, I could easily not have learned that until I was thirty, forty, or even seventy, as is the case with many lesbians and gay men.

Because of books such as these, and the omission of my sexual preference from the rest of the heterosexual literature and media, I functioned for many unfulfilled years somewhat like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, who imagined that fulfillment and happiness could be found in some foreign and unfamiliar land rather than with those whom she already loved.

Just as Dorothy made friends with the characters in Oz who reminded her of the folks back home, I attempted to find with boys some form of emotional interaction that approximated what I had felt for the girls I loved. To the girl I loved in the eleventh grade, I said, "I wish you were a man," still not having learned that our love was legitimate, in and of itself.

Fortunately, I eventually escaped from the entrapment of these novels. I am concerned that the adolescent years of those who may be gay or lesbian and are now reading these "happiness package" novels will be made far more difficult than necessary.—Leonore Gordon

prepares to write the story of their love.

The other three books published to date have a narrower focus. *Little Sister* concerns itself with—you guessed it—sibling rivalry. Cindy, the heroine, has virtually no concerns in life beyond her jealousy of her pretty older sister, Christine, and her obsessive conviction that Christine is stealing her boyfriend. One misunderstanding leads to another, but ultimately Cindy learns that Christine is blameless. Cindy is properly ashamed of her unfounded suspicions and makes it up with Christine. She is rewarded with not only a boyfriend, but the promise of a modelling career—a career which Christine wanted but could not have because she was too short.

In *Princess Amy*, the central character, who comes from a lower-middle-class family, is invited to spend the summer with her rich cousin Candace and her family on Mackinac Island in Michigan. The trip has been arranged by Amy's mother, who tells her, "You need to meet a better class of boys, handsome ones, rich ones. Boys who aren't afraid of beautiful girls like you." What follows is a morality tale, crammed with juicy details about the life-style of the affluent summer residents of Mackinac Island. Amy must choose between Candace's superficial and racy crowd, epitomized by dashing and arrogant Guy, and Pete, the "outsider" who works on the island. In spite of her scruples, Amy is flattered by

Guy's attentions and is persuaded to go horseback riding with him. Guy's recklessness results in Amy's being thrown off her horse and injured. Guy abandons her and Pete comes along and rescues her. Thus, Amy is punished by the accident for her "bad" inclinations, and at the same time rewarded for her scruples by winning the "good" boy.

The title of *The Popularity Plan* is self-explanatory. Frannie's friends devise a scheme to transform her from a shy mouse into the most popular girl in school. The plan involves bringing herself to the attention of a different boy every day through a flirtatious remark or action. Needless to say, her friends are careful to warn her off their own boyfriends: "'Jason's mine,' Charlene reminded her quickly. 'There're plenty of other boys to practice on.'" The plan works—too well. Soon Frannie is besieged by boys and has a date every night. When she calls off the plan because her new personality has turned off the quiet "good" boy she really wants, her friends desert her. Her decision to abandon flirtatiousness and to simply "be herself" wins her the "good" boyfriend.

### Books Inculcate Values

There is clearly an attempt in the Sweet Dreams books to inculcate some values other than superficial ones. The protagonists learn that popularity in and of itself is not always satisfying; that looks aren't necessarily everything; that honesty and being yourself are ultimately more rewarding. The problem is that, in spite of the books' endings, the sheer volume of detail about clothes, make-up, schemes for popularity and romantic settings is overwhelming and compelling. The cumulative effect of all this detail reinforces the books' superficial values and makes the contrived "moral" endings seem rather pallid in comparison.

But, even more insidious, the reward in these books for the lesson learned is the RIGHT BOY—the steady, solid, straightforward boy, yes, but the boy, nevertheless. Thus, the lesson is that being a good student, an Olympic swimmer, a great writer or even a basically decent human being—all are meaningless without a man to make life worthwhile. □

### About the Author

BRETT HARVEY, a free-lance writer, was formerly with *The Feminist Press*.

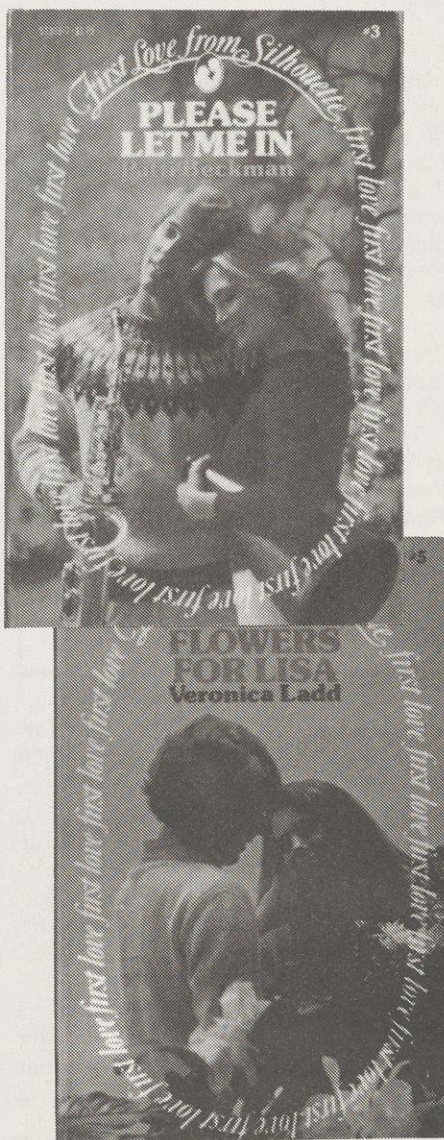


## First Love: Morality Tales Thinly Veiled

By Sharon Wigutoff

This fall, Simon & Schuster, publisher of the commercially successful Silhouette romances for adults, is releasing a new series for young readers entitled *First Love from Silhouette*. Xerox Education Publications will be selling this series to children through their extensive school book club market. For those students and teachers whose classes are affected, some words of advice: Let the buyer beware. Promoted as recreational, escapist fare for young girls, with a particular appeal to reluctant readers, these books in fact perpetuate outdated and limiting stereotypes about desirable female and male behavior, family structures, work, racial backgrounds and socio-economic levels. What follows is an examination of the books published thus far in the *First Love* series and the messages they are putting forth.

The Silhouette division of Simon & Schuster calls itself "America's Publisher of Contemporary Romance." "There is nothing quite as special as a *First Love*" states some promotional material for the series, which is aimed at young girls at the middle school and junior high school levels—girls who are still innocent about sex, inexperienced with boys, and highly susceptible to fantasies about what it will be like to be asked out on a date and to be kissed for the very first time. The series seeks to reassure these girls that after the awkward stage of pre-adolescence, when bodies are either short and chunky or tall and gangly, they will inevitably turn into swans. Like Scholastic's *Wildfire* series and Bantam's *Sweet Dreams*, the object of these transformations is always to attract male attention. When one chubby protagonist joins a health club to lose weight, the instructor tells her: "Before the summer's over, you



Xerox will distribute the latest romance series—Simon & Schuster's *First Love from Silhouette*—in schools.

can slip into a bikini and knock all the boys' eyes out. Now that's a goal worth working for!"

To date, there are six titles in the series: *New Boy in Town*, *Girl in the Rough*, *Please Let Me In*, *Serenade*, *Flowers for Lisa* and *Kate Herself*. They sell for an accessible \$1.75, and all have eye-catching covers featuring attractive young people who sometimes bear no physical resemblance whatsoever to the descriptions of the characters within the story.

As love stories go, the *First Love* books contain all the basic ingredients: there are boys who are tall, rangy or lanky; and there are girls who have no self-confidence until a desirable boy pays attention to them—"when you were a nobody, the surest way to feel like somebody was to have a boyfriend everybody else wanted."

The plots are incredibly similar and predictable, and the quality of the prose is low. Occasionally, however, the romantic descriptions sink to new depths:

Even in the crowded hallway between classes, Melissa could hear her heart thump wildly whenever she happened to spot Greg at his locker and had the opportunity, like now, to stand so close to him. His locker was just a few doors down from hers, and she never missed an opportunity to run her fingers over the metal door after he had closed it, hoping to catch a bit of warmth left over from his hands. . . .

While Janet and Joanne knew how Melissa felt about Greg, they didn't know Melissa's secret need to touch Greg's locker. This was a private part of her relationship with Greg's image. . . .

There is another side to these *First Love* books, however, that distinguishes them from other series. Woven through



the romantic plots are moral lessons that confirm the triumph of decency and sincerity over sinfulness and deception. The protagonists are always "good girls." They come from traditional families where virtue is still a virtue, and they are brought up to believe that the "important things in life [are] family, trusting, and love." Although they are sometimes tempted to rebel against these values in order to win favor with the boy they desire, they always manage to realize their misdirection before they have actually transgressed. For the preteen who may be viewing the high school scene with trepidation, there is reassurance that "happy" is not synonymous with "popular," and that growing up fast does not indicate maturity. This theme is most apparent in two of the books, *New Boy in Town* and *Please Let Me In*. In the first book, Stacey, sixteen, feels trapped when her strict parents forbid her to ride with boys after her older sister is killed in an auto accident. She falls for Garr Garwin, an older, more sophisticated young man, who convinces her to deceive her parents in order to date him. When he drinks beer in a restaurant and then tries unsuccessfully to seduce her in his car, she realizes that she should never have doubted her parents. Luckily for her, she finds that Kip, who had once seemed so dull and boring compared to Garr, is waiting for her. *Please Let Me In*, which opens with the quote about Greg's locker cited above, concerns Melissa's successful quest to be a member of the "in crowd." She joins the cheerleading squad, captures Greg the football captain, and drops her two best friends along the way. . . . She finds, however, that her new crowd is faster and wilder than she expected and quickly backs off:

She certainly was not the kind of girl to throw away all her standards for the sake of a few cheap thrills at an unchaperoned party. Tomorrow this would all be a memory, but she would have to live with herself forever. And if she violated her moral code, she would be the one to suffer the emotional consequences, not [the boy].

Luckily for her, she finds that Marshall, who had once seemed so dull and boring compared to Greg, is waiting for her. A variation on this theme appears in a third book, *Kate Herself*. Although Kate is the protagonist, the moral dilemma belongs to Ross, a sincere young man who is torn between his affection for Kate, who is sweet and unsophisticated, and his attraction to Lela, a beautiful and wealthy girl who is manipulative and elitist. Kate spends most of the book worrying that Ross, who drinks beer,

The first books I read were fairy tales. As a disabled child, I realized that I would never be a fairy princess and live happily ever after. But that was O.K. because I knew that there were few if any fairy princesses. As I grew older, my taste in books slowly changed, and in my early teens, I began to read true romance magazines. (Many of the Wildfire series are a junior version of these magazines.) The plots were superficial and the characters unconvincing and one dimensional. I could never see myself in any of these stories. The young women—they were always young—might have emotional or moral dilemmas, but they were always physically "perfect."

I was tremendously influenced by the romance stories in the movies, magazines and books of the time. I often thought that my problems would be taken care of if only a man would come along and sweep me off my feet. The struggle would be over and I would live happily ever after, like the girls do in so many of the Wildfire and Sweet Dreams books. There was one catch, of course, since I had to grow up with the dilemma of being considered asexual because I was disabled. It was difficult for me because I felt I was unlovable as I was.

Today's romance books are being written for children even younger than I was when my reading fare was *True Romances*. How much more needless pain they will cause today's disabled children!—Frieda Zames, Past President, Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York

will discover that her parents have forbidden her to drink and will drop her. Of course, in the end, Ross chooses Kate, whose sincerity has won his heart. In all these situations, the moral is that virtue is not its own reward, but rather that the true reward for being a good girl is that some nice, sincere boy will fall in love with you and validate your existence. The implication, of course, is that nothing could or should mean as much to a girl as the approval of a boy—not her own achievements, not her inner strength, not the satisfaction of having meaningful friendships with other females. While these other factors may be valued by the characters in these stories, being sought by that certain boy is clearly more important.

*Girl in the Rough* is the only book to date that varies from this formula. Its plot revolves primarily around the protagonist's developing skills as a serious tournament golfer, and the romantic interest is secondary. The main character, Kate, is self-motivated and pursues her interest in golf with a respectable determination. Another girl who exhibits assertiveness and independence is the main character in *Flowers for Lisa*. Lisa convinces the owner of a flower shop to hire her although he is not sure she can handle the physical demands of the job. She proves herself more than capable physically, but the story is ultimately disappointing because Lisa spends all her mental energy trying to attract the attention of the owner's handsome son.

Class differences provide the First Love authors with another opportunity to moralize. All the protagonists come from middle-class or lower-middle-class families. Although they are clearly not poor, none of these girls has money to spare for designer jeans or prom dresses. When a situation comes up that requires an extra expenditure, the girls find part-time jobs on Saturdays or after school. One works in a florist shop, another in a health club, another as a lifeguard at the community pool, and one sets up her own babysitting agency. There is no resentment about working—it is wholesome and enterprising. In *Serenade*, the school sponsors a Junior Professionals' Program to teach both girls and boys practical business management skills. Two of the six mothers in these books work—one is an accountant and the other a kindergarten teacher. The fathers are portrayed as hard workers and diligent providers. A clear message comes through that when one works hard for what one wants, there is greater appreciation and happiness. Lela, in *Kate Herself*, may be rich in material goods, but she is neglected by her parents who allow her to throw wild, unchaperoned parties. The protagonists of First Love books understand that parents show real love when they impose rules and restrictions.

You may be wondering what is wrong with these themes—is sincerity not, in fact, better than deception? Are hard work and self-motivation not worthwhile virtues? Is it so bad to reassure young people that they can survive the teenage years with their values intact? In the case of the First Love series, the answer is not so obvious, for behind these thinly-veiled morality tales, there are subtle—and not so subtle—messages about sex roles, race and class issues, and other political and social concerns.



Far from being harmless junior versions of escapist fiction, these stories abound with stereotypes that ignore or distort the reality of many young people today. They all take place in nondescript small towns. There are no apartment buildings, no slums, no buses or subways, no factories, only tree-lined streets with private one-family homes. The implication is that this is wholesome and *right*—that, in the best of all worlds, this is the most desirable environment. The families that live in these homes are traditional nuclear families—there are no divorced parents, no foster parents, no lesbian or gay parents, no grandparents living with the family. Again, the underlying implication is that the two-parent family is the *right* one, and all others are atypical and less desirable. Within these two-parent families, the father is the primary wage-earner. If the mother works outside the home, she is back when her children come home from school, as she *should* be. No child in the initial six First Love books comes home to an empty house. In one book, the protagonist praises her mother for ably handling the many aspects of fulltime homemaking. There is nothing wrong with this—in fact, it is nice to have young people aware of the complexities of managing a household. However, the authors imply that this division of labor, with the father working and the mother at home, is the *right* one, and that parents who divide their work and family responsibilities differently are less correct. When Kate in *Kate Herself* sets up her babysitting service, she checks out prospective families: “If there isn’t a respectable-looking woman in the family, I turn down the job.” The notion that a family might consist of a single father in need of a babysitter is absent.

Absence is, in fact, at the heart of the criticism of these books. Third World people are absent, disabled people are absent, lesbians and gay men are absent, poor people are absent, elderly people are absent. In the six books published to date, there are a total of three passing references to persons from minority cultures: one girl’s mother has “a trace of American Indian heritage,” a fact never mentioned again in the book; one saleswoman is “part Gypsy,” which explains how she can predict that buying a dress from her shop will bring happiness; and a woman named Gomez is the attending physician in an emergency room. All three are described as “dark,” having either dark eyes or dark skin, as though this indicates that they are exotic or un-

usual.

Political awareness is also absent. Nowhere in these stories is there any acknowledgment that there are institutional practices which influence and affect the lives of individuals. Although political issues are most notable for their absence, the following incident in *Flowers for Lisa* indicates the kind of insensitivity that sometimes surfaces. In the book, the protagonist fantasizes about the quaint little donkey carts in Latin America that bring flowers to the airports to be flown to florist shops in the States—a pretty picture that denies the harsh reality of the exploitation of workers in these economies. Another kind of insensitivity is seen in *Serenade*, when Sarah, thinking she has done something stupid, exclaims, “This is retarded! I’m retarded!” If the books weren’t already handicapist by virtue of their omission of disabled people, such comments would certainly place them in that category.

## An Interview at Xerox

On September 15 I drove to Middletown, Connecticut, to interview Jackie Ball, managing editor of book clubs at Xerox Education Publications. To compete with Scholastic’s Wildfire series, Xerox is distributing Bantam’s Sweet Dreams and Simon & Schuster’s First Love series through its READ Book Club. I wanted to find out why the Xerox editors felt the books should be sold through their school book clubs.

A pleasant woman in her thirties, Ball listened thoughtfully to my questions and views, but she never gave an inch in her defense of the books and of Xerox’s endorsement of them.

Ball began by stressing that the book clubs are intended to offer “recreational books” with the goal of encouraging kids to read. She maintained that the books were chosen primarily for their “student appeal,” although “of course, we look for good writing standards.” She pointed out that the READ Book Club offers a wide range of books in addition to teen romances—suspense fiction, “problem books,” sports books, humor, non-fiction—and that the teen romances simply “augment the list.” She admitted that the impetus to include the romances was in part due to Scholastic’s success with them, and to the fact that “we were aware of the new popularity of some of the older teen romances, like Beverly Cleary’s novels.”

Ball added, “You know, the YA books had become a little too heavy. There were so many problem books—so heavy and sober. The teen romances don’t deal with the heavier problems, but they have touches of realism.” I asked her what she felt was realistic about the books and she cited the fact that the mothers worked. When I pointed out that only a few of them worked, and that their work was played down and their “motherliness” highlighted, she responded that, after all, the mother’s problems and careers were not central to the novels. “Don’t we sometimes look for everything in children’s books? Is it fair to expect them to depict every facet of reality? After all, supportive parents are a reality, too.” She disagreed that the books suggest that a girl is incomplete without a boyfriend. “Let’s face it,” she said, “the reality is that acceptance by a boy *is* important to teenaged girls. But I don’t think these books suggest that a boy is going to solve all your problems.” Ball also felt that the element of competition among girls was “a reality. Whether we like it or not, it’s unreal not to think of other women as rivals.”

When asked about the absence of Black people in the books, Ball appeared genuinely startled. “You know,” she said, “I really hadn’t realized they were all-white. Of course, you’re absolutely right. I can only say that I think this genre is still so new and I think—I certainly hope—they’ll get better in the future.”—B.H.

The defenders of these books can hardly call them harmless in the face of these examples of negative, offensive stereotypes. The First Love series from Silhouette clearly makes its claim that one way of life is morally superior to others. To allow that claim to go unchallenged is to give it a credence it does not deserve. As teachers, parents and librarians we have choices to make. We can validate, by our silence, the prejudicial implications and omissions endorsed by the First Love world, or we can encourage young people to learn to read critically, to become aware of underlying messages, and to appreciate the value of a pluralistic world that supports, rather than denies, diversity. □

### About the Author

SHARON WIGUTOFF is author of *Books for Today’s Children and Books for Today’s Young Readers*, annotated bibliographies of non-sexist and non-racist books published by The Feminist Press.



*The claim that reading romances can turn children on to reading is based on faulty methodology, reports a reading specialist*

## Does Reading Pulp Lead to Reading Literature?

By Ruth S. Meyers

It is no secret that not all children understand the importance or the *use* of education. (Volumes have been written about the correlation of social and economic class and literacy.) Therefore, teachers hoping to reach such students attempt to utilize students' "interests" as a way of beginning the education process.

For many years I worked with children who could not or would not read their classroom material. One year, my third group was of sixteen-year-olds, chronic failures, sitting out time until they were eligible for working papers. Hoping to stimulate what the reading literature calls "interest as motivation" and to find appealing reading material, I asked these disengaged youngsters what they wanted most. "Wheels" was the unanimous and immediate response. And so I fashioned the curriculum. We started the semester with the manual for the state driving exam and moved on to *Auto Mechanics for Beginners*. These non-readers were soon bringing in auto-racing magazines and sharing my issue of the consumers' magazine which rated the current Detroit output. I learned a lot of grease pit talk, and they were on their way to becoming functionally literate.

When my students became proficient at reading manuals and following directions in print, I had hopes that this successful experience would affect their other studies, but I got little assurance from them or their teachers. "I wish we could read stuff like this in our other classes instead of that junk," was my students' cry. "They aren't interested," was each teacher's complaint. The teachers had my sympathy. I had the easier job. I could develop a curriculum around those students' needs; classroom teachers had to make a prescribed curriculum relevant.

Now, as a teacher trainer, I continue to be sympathetic to teachers who tell me that they will give reluctant readers anything that will turn them on to reading. Sympathetic but critical. Often in these

classrooms, I find youngsters reading cartoon editions of the classics, teenage romances or other so-called "high interest-low reading level" materials. My questions to teachers who use these materials are: what kind of reading are you turning students on to — and how do you define reading? I can understand allowing cartoon editions of the classics in the classroom if and only if that is the first step of a literature program. If not, teachers are pandering to immature tastes. Unless you move students away from the cartoons, you have accomplished nothing. My advice is to use the cartoons to familiarize your students with characters and story line; *then* introduce the original book. Help the students examine the world in which the author wrote. Have them compare the author's experience with their own. Discuss why the author wrote the book. See if your students agree with the ideas expressed in the book. And so on. Discussions around such questions can help youngsters grow in reading ability.

Reading educators have always been aware of the importance of content. Nila Bantam Smith, in a monumental study of reading instruction in this country,\* demonstrated how societal values have always been built into reading instructional materials. Smith points out, for example, that in the pre-revolutionary period of American history, the motives for instruction were to give children a thorough grounding in their religious faith and such reading ability as would enable them to read the Word of God for themselves. The primary materials were the Psalter and the hornbook, which featured the Lord's Prayer. In the early days of the republic, Smith continues, stress was placed on purifying the American language, developing loyalty to the new nation and "inculcating the high ideals of virtue and moral behavior." Instructional materials at that time were

therefore both nationalistic and moralistic readers. Much later, Dick and Jane were introduced. Feminists—if not Smith—see such material promoting the family as the center of a stable, consumer U.S. economy, socializing boys to independence and paid work and girls to passivity and to homemaking.

Now we have teenage romances issued, in part, by two of the largest publishers of educational materials. What are the motives for instruction with these materials? Unfair question, say publishers. These books are just for fun and not to be confused with other texts which teach children to sharpen their critical skills. These stories, say the publishers, will turn kids on to reading. Reading what? Will they turn kids on to mature reading or to reading in such content areas as history or science? Reading teachers have found, as I did, and research has documented, that reading has to be taught in each of these areas, because, in the language of the trade, there is little transfer from one form of reading to another.

Using these books to get children to read reinforces their appeal and is based on faulty methodology; children's interest in them is not automatically transferable. Although I certainly wouldn't want to validate these romances by making them assigned reading, the only sound classroom strategy for using the books would be as *part* of a lesson plan dealing with other, better books. At issue, in fact, is the "motive for instruction," the values and ethics that these books transmit. If students are encouraged to read romances in the authoritative context of the classroom, teachers and the education establishment are in effect endorsing them and the destructive messages they convey. Let us hope that they will choose to do otherwise.□

### About the Author

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\**American Reading Instruction* (Newark, Del.: International Reading Assn., 1965).



*Formula fiction is a time-killer, not a step to reading other literature, notes a librarian*

## In Turning Children On to Reading, Quality Counts

By Barbara Ann Porte

There are teachers, librarians and parents who believe that to instill children with a love of literature, or even just the habit of reading, one must sometimes start with poorly written, often stereotypical, formula fiction. They argue that in some unexplained way this will lead children to read better written, informative, insightful books. I cannot imagine why. Why would a monotonous book, with a predictable plot and cardboard characters do anything but reconfirm the judgment of many children that reading isn't worth their time.

It does not refute my point of view if you tell me, "But I have had children read one of these books and then go on to complete the series." It is true that having read one, a child may return for another like it. In their own peculiar way, such books, like television, tend to be addictive. But that really doesn't have much to do with reading. The child is merely killing time. I for one would just as soon a child killed time in front of a television set, playing outdoors, daydreaming best of all. Books are not about killing time, and anyone who may have told you so was wrong.

Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (Knopf) wrote, "The acquisition of skills, including the ability to read, becomes devalued when what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one's life. . . . The idea that learning to read may enable one later to enrich one's life is experienced as an empty promise when the stories the child listens to, or is reading at the moment, are vacuous." Aidan Chambers, educator and author, seconded this view in the *Horn Book Magazine*, October, 1977, saying, "Whatever one may think of Bettelheim's book in other respects, he states

here nothing but the truth." Rev. Jesse Jackson of Project EXCEL has said: "Many of us allow our children to eat junk, watch junk, listen to junk, talk junk, play with junk, [read junk,] and then we're surprised when they come out to be social junkies."

Over my shoulder someone (probably from ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom) hisses, "Children have the same right to read junk as adults do." I am reminded of the doctor from China who said, "In the U.S., you will never wipe out venereal disease. In your country, everyone has the right to have syphilis." In every society children are educated and at the same time "socialized." The best education will help a child examine values, sort them out, make decisions. Reading stereotyped and formula fiction is unlikely to achieve such ends—and for schools to seemingly endorse the values that these books promote is insupportable.

### What One Reads Is Crucial

To believe in democracy is to believe that what one reads is crucial. If what one read did not matter, governments and communities would not go to the lengths they do to see to it that books (meaning ideas) were banned. Our First Amendment right would be of little consequence. Of course it matters.

When *Roots* was on television I was first angered, then dismayed, when I heard white people, often educated people, saying, "I didn't know that. I didn't know that." How could they, how could any American, not have known that? But in fact people who do not read may really not have known the extent of the horror. Such realities are not taught in school. If children, if adults, do not read, there are many areas about

which they will know nothing. Their ability to function as citizens—as human beings—will be impaired.

I should not have to say it, but I know I must. *I oppose censorship in all its forms.* But we are speaking here not of censorship but of reader guidance, and if one is to guide readers then it must be from the belief that all reading is not equal, that some reading is better than other reading. A child who visits a library should have better than a fifty/fifty chance of coming home with something of value. And while what is valuable will differ from child to child, and though we cannot always agree on what it is, we can usually, if we are being honest, arrive at some consensus as to what is not.

When I suggest a book for a child I want it to be pleasurable in both an immediate and lasting way. I hope it will make her think. I hope it will offer insight, information, exposure to new viewpoints. I hope it will encourage her to read another book and then another until eventually she is what we call a reader, finally a thinker, which is my main goal in working with young people and books. I am after the long-term effect. I do not maintain that every book must do all these things, but a book that does none of them, that only kills time, will be cast aside when time runs out, like an afternoon nap.

I am a pragmatic person. I try to do what works. If I believed that dull, formula books truly encouraged reading, I would use them. I will do nearly anything to get a child to read. I tell you from experience, they do not work. On the other hand, good books may. I share with you an experience I had distributing books for the Reading Is Fundamental program at the Nassau County

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## A Short Course on Answering Those Who Defend Romance Series

By Sharon Wigutoff

*When they say:* These books are purely recreational. They are not intended for educational purposes.

*You can say:* This presupposes that there are two types of literature—the recreational book and the serious “message” book. This is a false distinction. All books carry messages and convey values. The very fact that the publishers of these series give “guidelines” to authors, telling them what kind of story to write, how the characters should be portrayed, what setting to use, what family structure to present, etc., indicates that definite values and lifestyles are considered appropriate and others are not. These books “educate” readers to accept these limited values and sex roles.

*When they say:* No one is force-feeding these books to children. Children choose to read them of their own free will.

*You can say:* There is a distinction between quality literature and formula writing, as between healthy food and junk food. To argue that children freely choose poorly-written sexist fiction over well-written fiction is to ignore the effects of sophisticated mass marketing techniques (attractive full-color covers; titles like *Dreams Come True*; high-powered media campaigns). It also ignores strong peer pressure to read what is “in.” An equally strong effort is required to counteract these pressures and encourage young people to choose better literature: appealing library displays, creative classroom assignments, discussions of book content, increased parent involvement in book selection—in other words, adult guidance.

*When they say:* These books encourage the reluctant reader to read. Once the young person gets used to reading, she or he will move on to better literature.

*You can say:* The ability to put letters

and symbols together in order to make words and sentences is an essential skill that enables one to function more efficiently in our society. If that alone is the goal of reading, then it truly doesn’t matter what is being read, as long as reading takes place. (Readers of romances have already acquired this skill.) But if reading goals go beyond this—to expand the mind, to develop critical thinking, to consider values and traditions, to touch the heart—then *content* and the *intent of content* and the *effect of content* must be considered. There may be children who, after tiring of watching all the reruns of “Three’s Company,” will switch to “Masterpiece Theatre.” More likely, they will switch to reruns of “Charlie’s Angels.” As in the above example, guidance and encouragement are important to help young people develop critical reading skills so that they will be able to make their own judgments about what is worthwhile reading.

*When they say:* School book club catalogs have always offered a wide range of selections, from classics to puzzle books.

*You can say:* While it is true that catalogs always contain variety, school book clubs have moved away from quality literature in favor of gimmick items. With the appearance of the heavily advertised teenage romance novels, the proportion of better fiction to formula fiction and “fun” items will drop even further. It is the responsibility of educators to insist on quality offerings, to use their discretion in what they pass on to students and to refuse to sell junk books.

*When they say:* The characters in these books are not intended to serve as role models.

*You can say:* Teenage romance books are not science fiction nor are they

fairy tales. They concern young people and their families and friends in purportedly realistic, contemporary situations. The roles the characters are meant to play are clearly set forth in the guidelines: the young heroine who desires to be popular; the warm, supportive father and mother; the lackluster friends who hold the heroine back; “the understanding girl friend”; “the class siren”; “the inappropriate boy friend”; and “the fond boy friend who may or may not turn out to be the hero.” (The quoted phrases are taken directly from the guidelines for Silhouette’s First Love series.) Since the audience is composed of young girls from eleven to fourteen, while the characters are all fifteen and older, the characters clearly have the *potential* of serving as role models for the younger children, whether it is intended or not.

*When they say:* These books are not sexist because they show the protagonist making her own decisions, having interests of her own, showing initiative, etc.

*You can say:* How come her decisions involve which color sweater to buy? Why do her interests tend toward learning some new cheerleading routines, and why is it that she shows initiative by figuring out how to win the attention of the football captain? You can also ask what the heroine’s career aspirations are, what her mother does all day, and how many different types of adult women are shown in the novel. Any book that implies that getting the right man solves life’s problems is sexist. □

### About the Author

SHARON WIGUTOFF is author of *Books for Today’s Children* and *Books for Today’s Young Readers*, annotated bibliographies of non-sexist and non-racist books published by The Feminist Press.



The author of a bibliography of recommended books from a feminist perspective suggests some alternatives to romance series

## An Antidote to Series Romances: Books about Friendship

By Sharon Wigutoff

Faced with the popularity of series romances, what can a teacher, librarian or parent recommend as an antidote? Granted that a wide range of books and lots of feminist literature are needed to counter all of the romances' insidious messages, one possibility might be books that focus on *friendships* between boys and girls rather than on romance-is-all tales. (It would also be nice to be able to recommend some good, solid books about *realistic* teenage romances, but unfortunately I haven't yet done research in that area; readers' suggestions are welcome!)

I have recently been evaluating novels for nine- to fourteen-year-olds for a study\* that sought to identify recent junior fiction that was well written and also free of negative stereotyping about race, sex, ethnicity, class, age, disabilities and sexual preference. Peer friendships was one of seven sub-categories in the study, and we sought books that depict sincere, meaningful friendships between girls and boys. Although most of the recommended books in this category concern same-sex friendships, several depict sensitive, non-romantic relationships between girls and boys who view each other not as members of an "opposite sex," but as people they value and respect and whose company they genuinely enjoy.

Although the absolute number of these books is small, three distinct themes can be discerned: 1) two young people who choose to befriend each other, 2) two or

more people who fall into a friendship more by circumstance than by choice, and 3) a relationship that is more of a mentor-student bonding, but nevertheless involves genuine affection.

The first theme—friendship based on free choice—can be illustrated by two excellent books: *Growin'* by Nikki Grimes (Dial, 1977) and *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson (Crowell, 1977). *Growin'* is the story of Pump, a young Black girl who moves to a new neighborhood following the accidental death of her father. Her grief is exacerbated by the fact that her father encouraged her skill in writing poetry, while her mother is disdainful. In her new school, Pump meets and befriends Jim-Jim, the class bully who turns out to be a gentle, nurturing boy who loves to draw. They each admire the other's talents, and their friendship is genuine and believable. *Bridge to Terabithia*, a Newbery Award winner, is a memorable story of the friendship between Jess, a quiet, introspective farm boy, and Leslie, a spirited, imaginative girl who moves from a cosmopolitan area to Jess's rural community. Their relationship is beautifully developed and shows young readers that girls and boys can indeed be real friends. However, at the end of the story, the author surprises us by having Leslie die accidentally. This leaves the disturbing suggestion that perhaps such a friendship was, after all, too unreal to sustain. We realize, too, after the tears dry, that this is ultimately not a story about friendship at all, but about a young boy whose limited world is opened up by a temporary visit from an almost mystical character—this is a contemporary fairy tale. Leslie serves, in fact, less as a friend

than as an enabler, and Jess clearly realizes this at the end of the story:

It was Leslie who had taken him from the cow pasture into Terabithia and turned him into a king. He had thought that was it. Wasn't king the best you could be? Now it occurred to him that perhaps Terabithia was like a castle where you came to be knighted. After you stayed for a while and grew strong you had to move on. For hadn't Leslie, even in Terabithia, tried to push back the walls of his mind and make him see beyond to the shining world—huge and terrible and beautiful and very fragile? . . .

Now it was time for him to move out. She wasn't there, so he must go for both of them. It was up to him to pay back to the world in beauty and caring, what Leslie had loaned him in vision and strength.

In spite of these reservations about the underlying messages in the book—and one or two offensive references to Native Americans, *Bridge to Terabithia* is an outstanding novel for young people, and its surface plot of a mutual girl-boy friendship remains a valuable one.

### Friendship by Circumstance

The second type of girl-boy friendship stories concerns relationships that come about more by circumstance than by free choice. *Sea Glass* by Laurence Yep (Harper & Row, 1979) is the story of Craig, a Chinese American boy whose father pressures him to win approval from his white classmates on their terms. Confused by his role as a child of two cultures, he falls into a friendship with Kenyon, a young white girl who is embarrassed when her parents' bohemian lifestyle sets her apart from her peers. Their friendship is based on a mutual need for

\*The recommendations of the study, which was funded by the Rockefeller Family Fund through The Feminist Press, will appear as an annotated bibliography entitled *Books for Today's Young Readers* by Jeanne Bracken and Sharon Wigutoff with Illene Baker (The Feminist Press, October 1981).



# TRIAL VALLEY

AUTHORS OF WHERE THE LILIES BLOOM  
VERA AND BILL CLEAVER



## SEA GLASS

by Laurence Yep



## GROWIN'?

by Nikki Grimes · pictures by Charles Lilly



acceptance because of what they are, not for what others think they should be.

*Home Is Where They Take You In* by Brenda Seabrooke (Morrow, 1980) concerns the friendship between Benicia Echeverra and James Beasley, two young people shunned by their classmates because they are different. Though they become allies by default, they turn their relationship into a positive one, drawing strength from each other and providing the support and caring they both need to deal with their respective problems. *The Alfred Summer* by Jan Slepian (Macmillan, 1980) is the story of a four-way friendship among young people who are all out of the mainstream for different reasons: Alfred is retarded, Lester has cerebral palsy, Myron is overweight and clumsy, and Claire is a "tomboy," in an earlier time (1937) when independent girls were rejected for not conforming. Writing with a wry humor and offering young people valuable perspectives on handicapping conditions, the author has made this an appealing story.

### Mentor-Student Friendship

Mentor-student friendships occur in three excellent junior novels—*The Gift Giver* by Joyce Hansen (Houghton Mifflin, 1980), *The Magic of the Glits* by C.S. Adler (Macmillan, 1979) and *Alan and Naomi* by Myron Levoy (Harper & Row, 1977). All three involve older boys and younger girls. *The Gift Giver* is the story of Doris and Amir. Doris, whose strict parents have restricted her after-school activities, worries that she will lose the friendship of the other children in her Bronx neighborhood. The older and wiser Amir befriends her and teaches her that before others can like you, you must learn to like and value yourself. In *The Magic of the Glits*, Jeremy is a twelve-year-old boy who reluctantly agrees to babysit for Lynette, a seven-year-old girl who has lost both her parents. His successful efforts to reach her and pull her out of her depression result in a strong bond of affection between them that is very touching. *Alan and Naomi* is similar in its basic plot outline, but it is a much more serious and disturbing book. Naomi is a refugee from Nazi Europe, whose traumatic memories of the Holocaust have made her frightened and withdrawn. With painstaking care and concern, Alan struggles to break through Naomi's silence and win her trust. Each of these boys—Amir, Jeremy and Alan—exhibit qualities that are rarely found in male protagonists, as indeed they are

scarce in real life: sensitivity, patience, nurturance, gentleness, tenderness and affection. They, in addition to the boys in the other books cited, offer young readers positive examples of males who are cooperative rather than competitive, who see girls as individuals, capable of becoming their friends.

### A Self-Reliant Protagonist

I will conclude with a new junior novel whose independent female protagonist offers her views on love and marriage. *Trial Valley* by Vera and Bill Cleaver (Lippincott, 1977) is the story of Mary Call, a sixteen-year-old Appalachian farmer who is raising two younger siblings alone after her parents' death. Her brother-in-law advises her to be more feminine, warning her that, as she puts it:

The opinions I craft and practice are too powerful for a female. He says no man will ever grow dizzy with love for me. That masterful girls like me scare men off. . . . Men, God pity them, are such poor sticks. They are too nervous and weak. I don't ever want one to grow dizzy with love for me. There is already enough nonsense in this world for my tastes and energies.

In spite of her insistent self-reliance—or perhaps because of it—two very appealing young men do fall in love with Mary Call, offering to marry her and make her difficult life easier and more secure. She rejects them both, choosing to think a while longer about what she wants to do with her life.

One of the things Mary Call wants to do is read more books. Books, she believes, "pull you up out of yourself. They show you the steeples." Not all books bother to aim that high, and of those that do, not all succeed. The books cited above, however, do succeed in portraying girls and boys who are interesting, multi-dimensional individuals. The authors, all of whom are outstanding writers, have clearly rejected limiting, stereotyped notions of appropriate female and male behavior. For those young people who appreciate good books, and for those adults who try to recommend fine literature for children, these books on peer friendships can help to point out the steeples. □

### About the Author

SHARON WIGUTOFF is author of *Books for Today's Children* and *Books for Today's Young Readers*, annotated bibliographies of non-sexist and non-racist books published by The Feminist Press.



# Examining the Issues: What Teachers Can Do

By Sharon Wigutoff and the Council Staff

## Objectives

Students will demonstrate growth in the following areas:

1. Critical reading and thinking skills (drawing inferences, making judgments, evaluating);
2. Ability to identify stereotypic presentations.

**Age Level:** Grades five-twelve.

**Time Needed:** One class period.

**Materials Needed:** One copy of the eight quotes plus questions on pp. 24-25 cut apart for distribution to the class.

## Procedure

- *Divide* the class into eight groups; try to include both boys and girls in each group.
- *Assign* one of the eight excerpts and accompanying questions below to each group.
- *Ask* each group to discuss the assigned excerpts using the discussion questions that accompany the quote.
- *Ask* each group to select a person who will be responsible for reading the excerpt and questions aloud and reporting the group discussion to the entire class.
- After reports are offered to the entire class, *ask* students to draw conclusions, using the summary questions below.

## Summary Questions

After each small group reports its discussion, *discuss* the following questions with the entire class.

- What characteristics seem to be desirable or important to the characters in these books? Are they important to you?

What other things are important to you? What similar things do boys and girls see as important? What different things are important to them?

- *Discuss* the meaning of stereotype. (A stereotype is an over-simplified generalization about a particular group, race, or sex which often carries derogatory implications.) Was there anything stereotypic in these excerpts? Explain.

*Read* the following paragraph to the class; *discuss* the accompanying questions with students.

All the stories in these novels take place in small towns, and the main characters live with both their mother and father in a private one-family house. No one lives in a city, no one is poor, no one is disabled and no one is divorced. Fathers always work outside the home; mothers generally stay home, although a few mothers do paid work in addition to assuming full responsibility for all household tasks.

- Do you feel that this is a realistic representation of our society? Why or why not?
- Does this reflect the world you live in? How is it similar? How is it different?
- Describe some other situations the authors might deal with. Tell about some good books that you have read that address some of these situations.

**"It is just the literature we read for amusement or purely for pleasure that may have the greatest . . . least suspected . . . earliest and most insidious influences upon us. Hence it is that the influence of popular novels, popular plays of contemporary life, require to be scrutinized."**—T.S. Eliot

## Optional Activity

*Discuss* the statistics\* below with the class.

1. Women are about half of the U.S. population, but they are 70 per cent of all U.S. citizens considered really "poor" by the government.

2. Women who work full-time, year-round, earn 60¢ for every \$1 earned by a full-time working man. Women who work for part of the year earn less than half of men who work part of the year.

3. Over half of all women work for pay. And 40 per cent of women with children under six years go to work. A little over half of all working women are married. The rest are single, divorced, widowed.

4. For every two marriages, there is one divorce.

5. Three-fourths of all husbands who are supposed to pay for child support after a divorce don't pay after the first year.

6. Most married women work at least 25 years. Unmarried women work about 42 years.

7. Most working women are office workers, retail sales people, hairdressers, waitresses and garment sewers. All these so-called "women's jobs" pay less than most men's jobs.

- Given the facts cited in the statistics, *ask* the class if romance books give young women a realistic picture of what their future might hold. *Ask* if they help young women plan realistically for their future. Why or why not?

\*All facts from *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1980*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.



# Read Aloud

## Make teens avid readers with...

"Sweet Dreams" romances · Judy Blume  
· exquisite tales of terror!



Above, the October issue of Xerox's Read book club, which features series romances on the cover. Since all of the series are published regularly—one or more titles each month—there will be a steady supply for school clubs. At lower right, one of the Wildfire titles sold through Scholastic's book clubs.

### Excerpt I

Suzy's mother, Mrs. Simmons, urges her to drop her old friends because they are not popular:

"With friends like Patty, Mousie, and Kate, you don't need enemies," Mrs. Simmons said. . . . "Find one or two new friends, then that will lead to other friends, boyfriends, dates, parties, games, and all the things that young girls want." (From *Suzy Who?* [Wildfire])

- Do you agree with Mrs. Simmons about Suzy dropping her old friends? Why or why not?

- How do you choose your friends?
- Do you share the same interests with all your friends?

- Do you agree that the things that Mrs. Simmons mentions are "all the

things that young girls want"? Are there other things young girls may want?

- What do you think are the things young boys want? In what ways are they the same as what girls want? In what ways are they different?

- Do these desires apply to all girls? All boys? Why or why not?

### Excerpt II

"Melissa felt lucky having such swell girl friends. They all understood each other and had a comfortable rapport. But nothing could quite take the place of not having a boyfriend." (From *Please Let Me In* [First Love])

- How do you evaluate your friends?
- Do you agree with Melissa's statement that it is less important to have friends of the same sex than to have a romantic involvement with someone of the other sex? Why or why not?

- Reverse the sexes in the excerpt so that a boy is speaking about having male friends as compared to having a girlfriend. How do you feel about the statement now? Give reasons for your answer.

- How do you feel when a friend breaks an appointment with you to go on a "date"? Would you break an appointment with a friend to go on a date? Why or why not?

### Excerpt III

Melissa says, "When you were a nobody, the surest way to feel like somebody was to have a boyfriend everybody else wanted." (From *Please Let Me In* [First Love])

- Do you think Melissa's statement is true? Why or why not?

- Why do you think having a desirable boyfriend or girlfriend would make someone a "somebody"?

- Could the same thing be said about boys having a girlfriend?

- What other ways can you think of to be a "somebody"?

- What would make you feel worthwhile?

### Excerpt IV

"How could Didi be depressed about not making the honor roll when she had a boy who cared about her so much?" (From *Laurie's Song* [Sweet Dreams])

- Do you think success in one area of life can satisfy all of your needs?

- Do you value academic achievement in girls? In boys?

- Do you think academic achievement is as important for girls as for boys? Is it more important for one sex than the other? Explain your answer.

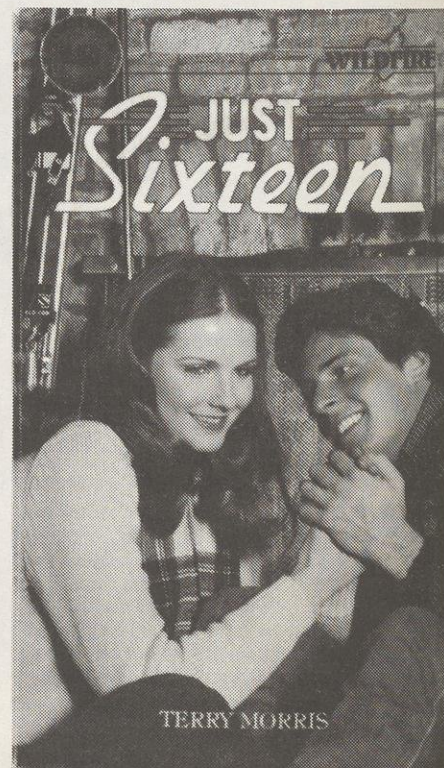
- What do you think the author of the excerpt is saying about getting good grades and having a boyfriend? Do you agree? Why or why not?

- Do you think the author would have written the same sentence about a boy who had a girlfriend? Why or why not?

- Would you agree with the following sentence: "How could Tom feel depressed about not making the team when he had a girlfriend who cared about him so much?" Why or why not?

### Excerpt V

"Stacey spent over an hour getting ready for the party. Shower. Shampoo. She gave her hair a blow dry, letting it fall in true pixie fashion. She had used a protein conditioner and her hair had a shining burnished look, like polished pennies. She dressed carefully. White jeans and shirt, new sweater. Usually she just washed her face and applied a little lip gloss, but tonight she worked carefully with creamy foundation, mascara and a lavender-blue eye shadow that really did make her eyes look extra large and extra blue. When she finished, she added a pale coral lip gloss and a





matching shade of polish on her nails. All this for Brad? No, all this for herself. She always felt her best when she knew she looked her best." (From *New Boy in Town* [First Love])

- What do you do when you are getting ready for a party?
- What do you think Brad did to get ready for the party?
- Do you feel that people can look their best without makeup? Why or why not?
- Where do you think people get the idea that makeup makes them look better?
- Why do you suppose that girls wear makeup to look better and not boys?

#### Excerpt VI

"Amy loved having Billy pick her up after work every night, even though he was just a friend, not really a date. But her mother didn't like him. 'Billy!' she had said. 'Don't be ridiculous, Amy. He doesn't even dress right. You need to meet a better class of boys, handsome ones, rich ones.'" (From *Princess Amy* [Sweet Dreams])

- How do you feel about Amy's mother's statement? Why?
- What do you think "a better class of boys" means?
- What does it mean to dress "right"? To dress wrong?
- Do you think boys and girls can be friends, without being romantically involved? Why or why not?

#### Excerpt VII

"When [Merri] heard that Ellynn's father was dead, she asked, 'Is your mother looking for a new husband?'"

Ellynn answered briefly, 'My mother is in law school.'

'How weird!' Merri exclaimed." (From *Dreams Can Come True* [Wildfire])

- Why do you think Merri says, "How weird!"?
- Do you think Ellynn's mother's decision to go to law school is weird? Why or why not?
- Statistics show that women outlive men. Do you think married women should plan for their future? Explain your answer.
- Can you think of reasons that married women work even though their husbands are alive?
- Do you know women who choose not

to marry? Do you believe that this is a valid choice? Explain your answer.

#### Excerpt VIII

In her new school, Ellynn, who is white, becomes best friends with Willie Evans, "a tall, slim, exotically beautiful black girl." When Ellynn goes to Willie's house after school, the book says, "It was the second time she'd visited the Evans house, so she wasn't startled by their splashy use of reds, oranges, and yellows. At first sight she'd been too shocked to decide, but now she looked around Willie's brilliant orange and yellow bedroom with the zebra-striped rug and black and white checked bedspread and decided she liked it." (From *Dreams Can Come True* [Wildfire])

- What makes someone exotic? Why do you think the author used the term exotic to describe Willie?

• What do you think the author is suggesting in the description of Willie's home?

• Aside from Willie Evans, there are almost no Third World characters in the teenage romance novels similar to the one from which the quote above was taken. If you are a person of color, how do you feel about the absence of Third World characters? If you are white, how do you feel about the absence of Third World characters?

• If you have read any of the teenage romance novels, how many Third World characters did you meet? How were they described? How did the description make you feel about these characters?

#### About the Author

SHARON WIGUTOFF is author of *Books for Today's Children and Books for Today's Young Readers*, annotated bibliographies of non-sexist and non-racist books published by The Feminist Press.

## Combating Handicapism by Emily Strauss Watson

Developing specific classroom activities based on Scholastic's Wishing Star series presents several problems, particularly for those books dealing with disabilities. Combating handicapist stereotypes in literature is based largely on breaking down societal myths regarding people with disabilities. These myths are in turn perpetuated by ignorance of disabilities and lack of exposure to people with disabilities. Thus, in order to effectively combat these negative stereotypes, the teacher must be armed with considerable information, information that is omitted or distorted in the Wishing Star books themselves. One way the teacher can develop a solid informational base from which to teach about people with disabilities would be to refer to the CIBC *Bulletin on Handicapism* (Vol. 8, Nos. 6 & 7, 1977). Positive literature about people with disabilities include *Belonging* by Deborah Kent and *Like It Is: Facts and Feelings from Kids Who Know* by Barbara Adams. These two books represent a realistic, positive image of teenagers with disabilities and are written in a style and manner appropriate to the young teenage reader.

An additional problem encountered in developing classroom activities is that the titles published to date show a

tremendous range of style and content presentation, ranging from totally unacceptable to acceptable with reservations. Consequently, the teacher would be hard pressed to develop common themes and ideas which could be discussed by a class which may or may not have read one or more of the Wishing Star books.

One positive suggestion for a follow-up classroom activity can be made regardless of how the teacher may choose to deal with the Wishing Star books. Following introductory discussions on stereotypes and how disabled people are portrayed in media, the teacher may wish to invite a disabled person to come and speak to the class. Having a "real live" person in the classroom is often the best way to break down stereotypes and gain new information and insight. Whoever comes to class should be willing to respond to questions and deal with potentially awkward questions in an honest, forthright manner. Speakers can be obtained by contacting local disability rights organizations (See *Bulletin*, Vol. 8, Nos. 6 & 7, 1977).

#### About the Author

EMILY STRAUSS WATSON is a board member of Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York.



## Formula Writing—It's Nothing New

By Donnarae MacCann

Formula writing has characterized children's literature—particularly fiction—for more than a century. A look at popular formulas of the past helps us see the regressive aspects of the current teen romances.

Many of the traditional "classics"—novels by Louisa May Alcott, Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Frances Hodgson Burnett, as well as the short tales of Hans Christian Andersen and Rudyard Kipling—appeared first in children's periodicals. They were not considered more respectable than the same magazines' hackneyed and formula-written stories: "Little Dilly, or the Uses of Tears," "Nan: The New-Fashioned Girl" and "What Came of Making Pickles." The pulp "weeklies" of the 19th century started out with the same "elevated" goals as those seeking to appeal to the gentry (two popular English pulp weeklies—the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Girl's Own Paper*—were products of the Religious Tract Society), but in the end they became purely escapist. The current new series of preteen and teenage romances have roots in both the gentry and the pulp fiction models, but they are more closely connected with the soap opera triangles and domestic banalities of the 19th century girls' weeklies.

The girls' papers in Victorian times urged solutions of borax for bathing the armpits and advised girls to drink vinegar to achieve "an interesting pallor." Wildfire's 1981 *Dreams Can Come True* opens with a honey and cucumber facial which feels like "a mask of concrete" to the protagonist, and many of the new books could serve as instruction manuals on hair care. The delectable dishes served up at modern fictional teenage parties are prepared with only a little less rapture than those in the 1915 *Pollyanna Grows Up*: "I just love to beat eggs and sugar, and hear the soda gurgle its little tune in the cup of sour

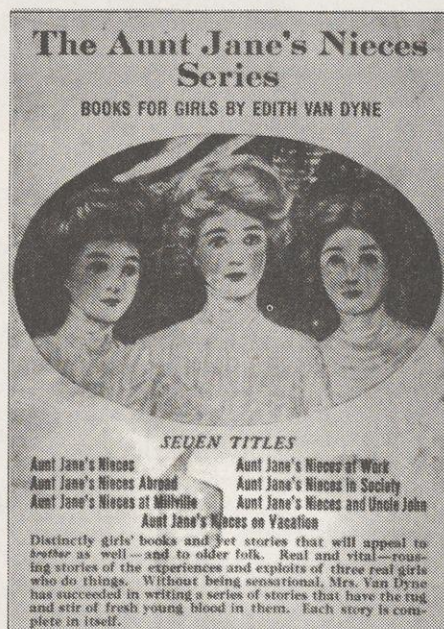
milk," says Pollyanna. One of our modern protagonists "tried on six yellow cardigan sweaters before she found the perfect one," and "spent all morning . . . weighing one gray flannel skirt against another. . . ." *Girls' Favorite*, a paper started in 1922, wrestled with similar burning issues: Is a girl best served by bobbed hair or long, by artificial silk stockings or wool?

The most famous boys' weekly in the U.S. carried the nondescript title *Frank Leslie's Boys' Weekly*, but in England the titles reveal the huge gap between social norms for boys and girls. Boys' papers were called *Triumph*, *Champion*, *Hotspur*, *Wizzard*, *Gem* and *Magnet*, while papers for girls and women had titles pointing either to domesticity or to the mysterious behavior of a modern Eve: *Girls' Home*, *Fam-*

*ily Star*, *Secrets*, to name a few. Storylines in the boys' papers centered around school life and featured characters such as the boy-detective, the talented eccentric, the clever scholar and various athletic types. They also included serialized adventures with settings in the "Frozen North" and the "Wild West," or the battle-grounds of the Foreign Legion and World War I. A curious feature of the girls' papers was the confusion over audience; for 30 years the male editor of the *Girls' Own Paper* couldn't decide whether his periodical was for girls or women, and he attempted to serve both markets. He also had to satisfy the men's preconceptions, since Victorian husbands had the privilege of programming all their wives' activities, including their reading.

In the early fiction for girls, narratives often ended with the ecstasy of a protagonist's engagement. Today's romances end with similar raptures when the protagonist finds her true love—even though no nuptials are announced. In series novels for boys, girls rarely appeared at all. (Tom Swift, however, remains engaged to Mary Nestor for 31 years!)

Turning to the formulas popular with the gentry publishing establishment—the houses started by Holt, Putnam, Appleton, Harper, Scribner—it's easy to see relationships between the 19th century and contemporary examples. The 19th century plot pattern that R. Gordon Kelly calls "the ordeal"\* enables writers to dramatically highlight the specific social behavior they want to transmit. The protagonist becomes isolated from adult support, faces a challenge and ultimately returns to an ordered, meaningful social environment. In Alcott's "Bonfires" (1873), the ordeal is braving a stormy night



A 1909 series, precursor of the girl detective series, was promoted as stories "about girls who do things."

\*See bibliography.



and stopping a train at the brink of a washed-out bridge. Today's protagonists face different challenges, but this formula is still a popular tool. Today the ordeal might be a pre-Olympic swim meet (see *California Girl*), and the desired support is peer approval rather than parental approbation.

Another major 19th century formula involved a deep conversion or revelation. (Kelly calls this the "change of heart" formula.) In today's romance novels the conversions stop short of sainthood for the protagonists, but the basic cultural value system continues to be clearly stressed. Sometimes text is even italicized so the reader will be sure to notice the moments of heartfelt self-searching.

At the turn of the century girls were depicted in somewhat more active—even adventurous—roles. A 1909 formula series entitled *Aunt Jane's Nieces* was said to be "about girls who do things." At first the girls did things in groups (it was safer that way). There were *The Adventure Girls*, *The Khaki Girls*, *The Linger-Not Girls*, *The Motor Maids*, *The Flying Girls*, among many others. These protagonists could set out in their cars or motor boats or airplanes and do pretty much what they wanted, within limits. Nonetheless, they, too, had an overriding preoccupation—romance.

From the 1930's to the early 1940's, girls in juvenile series had a broader range of adventure; romance books did not dominate the field during this period. Girls read the boy detective books, and publishers quickly saw the advantage of creating sleuths with whom girls could identify. (Moreover, this was a time when careers were opening up to women.) There emerged the Bobbsey Twins, the Dana Girls, Vicky Barr, Cherry Ames, and the most "liberated" of them all—Nancy Drew. Bobbie Ann Mason points out in *The Girl Sleuth* (Feminist Press, 1975) that although adventure was the superstructure of the girl detective series, domesticity was their bedrock. Nancy herself was cool and adventuresome, yes, but also she was very much a "lady" and "dainty" to the core.

If for a time girls' series seemed to be heading toward emancipation, by the late 1940's females were firmly back in their place (women were being sent from the marketplace back to the home), and themes of romance gained the ascendancy. Betty Cavanna followed the earlier girl-detective formula

## Guidelines for Romance

Below, excerpts from some of the tip-sheets that publishers of romance series give to aspiring authors. Unfortunately, the Wildfire guidelines could not be included because Scholastic editor Ann Reit was unwilling to share them with us.

### Silhouette Books—First Love (Simon & Schuster)

Silhouette First Loves are written primarily for girls twelve to sixteen years old. They are always written from the viewpoint of the young heroine and deal with her day by day problems, her uncertainties, and her first romantic encounters. These books are about normal kids and the feelings they have as they are growing up.

The heroine is fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen, the hero no more than a year or two older than she. Though usually they are still in high school, it is permissible for the hero to have just graduated, especially if the novel takes place in the summer. The tension in these novels lies in the heroine's struggles with common adolescent problems, her romantic fantasies as opposed to the realities, and her desire to define herself. Her fantasies include the more down-to-earth dreams of being the most popular girl in the class, the star of the school play, the class cheerleader, a first date, going steady, etc. Prominent in these novels is the heroine's inexperience and shyness in dealing with the inevitable misunderstandings of a first romance. The novel traces with sensuous, though not graphic detail, the development of this first love. Sometimes tension is built up as the heroine becomes infatuated by an inappropriate boy friend or picks up with a wild crowd who encourages responses for which she is not ready. Conflicts and misunderstandings may occur even when the heroine has found just the right boy for her as one of them realizes that they are too young for a permanent involvement.

Peripheral characters are parents, teachers, the understanding girl friend, the class siren and the fond boy friend who may or may not turn out to be the hero. The ending of a First Love though, is always upbeat. . . .

### Wishing Star (Scholastic)

Wishing Star is a line of contemporary problem books for teenage girls twelve-fifteen. The plots should deal with some of the more serious problems of young girls today, like divorce, school difficulties, loneliness, death, parental things, etc. No books will deal with sexual matters, like abortion, unmarried pregnancy, affairs. There should, however, be a romance in every book.

The heroines are fifteen or sixteen and the heroes are seventeen and eighteen. . . . There can be no explicit sex and, in fact, no sexual involvement between the couple except kissing and feelings of attraction.

Vocabulary: . . . beyond normal considerations for this age level there are no vocabulary restrictions, except no four-letter words.

There should be good character delineation and plot development.

### Sweet Dreams (Bantam)

Each Sweet Dreams romance features a heroine who is about sixteen years old—an ordinary, middle-class suburban girl, with a family to match. The romantic interest, a boy of the same age or a little older, should appear early in the story—the sooner the better. The girl should have a warm, supportive family, and one or two close friends in whom she confides. The plot is moved by a conflict or conflicts embracing adolescent life—finding one's identity, finding that special boy, choosing between suitors, overcoming shyness or self-doubt, becoming popular, succeeding in sports, and so forth. Variations in the above guidelines are acceptable if integral to the plot. . . .

Lastly, there should be no profanity, no religious references, and no explicit sex. We endorse hugging and kissing, of course. Where would romance be without them? . . .

### Caprice Romance (Ace Books)

Caprice Romances are contemporary young adult first-love novels that will express the restlessness of youth and the wonder of falling in love.

PLOT: The first meaningful romantic interlude in a young woman's life. Although she may have dated before, she believes that this one is the real thing. The development of emotional and physical feelings toward a young man, the confusion these feelings bring on and the happiness which results when confusion gives way to caring . . . this is the world of Caprice.

The young people are basically good. One or the other may be selfish or vain on oc-

Continued on next page



with her Connie Blair mysteries, but her protagonists were glamor girls. Cavanna stressed looks, popularity and "femininity"—as, for example, in *The Yellow Warning*: "She put a hand on his arm and looked at him in a way that would have melted a stronger man." During the 1940's, the 1950's and into the 1960's teenage reading fare became increasingly more melodramatic and the girl protagonists more passive, as "female" and "male" sex roles were rigidly defined. By 1966, Cavanna's girl protagonist in *A Breath of Fresh Air* is careful to avoid high heels when she is with her David, to give him a "respectable two inches of dominance." David is "like the oak tree to which she clung . . . a rock, a tower of strength, all her life, she must be able to lean on." In the story the protagonist researches the life of Louisa May Alcott and concludes that "instead of becoming a career woman she [Alcott] might have been a fulfilled and contented wife and mother. And wasn't that every woman's dream?"

Romances did not disappear in the late 1960's and early 1970's but they took a back seat as other kinds of formulas became commercial in the "realistic" book and the women's movement encouraged books that provided less restrictive role models. According to the *Subject Guide to Children's Books in Print*, romances started to climb again in the mid and late 1970's—a time when the gains of the Civil Rights and the Women's Movements were challenged by a conservative backlash.

Like soap operas and B movies, formula romances are dream factories. By simply repeating conventional assumptions and values, formula fiction overlooks life's complexities and falsifies life itself. They induce passivity and cheat people of direct, genuinely passionate experience. Life becomes a non-happening. It's ironic that people who inveigh against the drug culture should be pushing the opiate of cheap daydreams.

Speaking of escapist fiction in his essay, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," C.S. Lewis said:

The dangerous fantasy is always superficially realistic. The real victim of wishful reverie . . . prefers stories about millionaires, irresistible beauties, posh hotels. . . . For, as I say, there are two kinds of longing. The one is an *askesis*, a spiritual exercise, and the other is a disease. (*Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed., 1980)

#### Continued from previous page

casion, any number of pitfalls are allowed as long as they are acknowledged and rectified by the end of the book, and as long as both members of the relationship remain likable to some extent.

A strong subplot is encouraged. . . . There can be family or school traumas, problems or joys, as long as the focus remains on the love aspect.

Although these books are traditional romances in that they are comparatively innocent, our young people are not unaware of sex. They "make-out" and may have the first stirrings of sexual desire but description must be sensitively handled and they will not follow through on their desires.

CHARACTERS: The girl is fifteen or sixteen and a virgin. . . .

The boy is sixteen or seventeen, not necessarily a virgin but he respects this girl too much to sleep with her yet. . . .

#### AND FOR A SLIGHT VARIATION . . .

##### Windswept (Scholastic)

Windswept is a line of contemporary Gothic romances for teenage girls twelve-fifteen. The plots will differ from garden variety Gothics by being about *real* girls who become involved in the "Gothic situation" through realistic events.

For example, a girl whose mother is dead moves with her father to a small California cliff town. She's the "new girl in town," without friends and lonely and apprehensive about the eerie cliff house she must call home. In this moody, turbulent setting she falls in love with a young man whose past involves her in strange and frightening happenings.

. . . Equally important . . . is a strong romance which should run through the entire book. The hero should be two-three years older; not an older man.

There should be no occult elements in these books.

The heroines are sixteen or seventeen and the heroes are eighteen-twenty. The girls are high school students or just out of high school. There can be no explicit sex and, in fact, no sexual involvement between the couple except kissing and feelings of attraction. . . .

This disease—an obsession with romance, appearance, popularity—joins with other sexist forces to reduce young women's aspirations and self-esteem. In the end, everyone suffers. □

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#### About the Author

DONNARAE MacCANN, a contributor to *The Arbutnot Anthology of Children's Literature*, is a columnist for *Wilson Library Bulletin*.



## Lust for Love

As she read, her soft lips trembled in anticipation, and when at long last she knew that Kate had captured the heart of the dark and brooding Damien Savage, her eyes filled with tears of joy.

As she closed the cover of the thin volume, she yearned for more. Yet she did not worry for she knew that the next Harlequin novel would take her away from the piles of laundry, dreary typing and the other drudgeries that fill her days.

But what, besides escape from an unexciting life, is she seeking? And what is she getting?

For one thing she and the 10 million other women who read Harlequin novels are being told over and over that the ways of the "traditional woman" lead to a happy life and a successful marriage, according to Mariam Frenier, a history professor at the University of Minnesota at Morris.

"Harlequins give lessons which indicate that if a woman is loving and patient and changes her behavior to suit her man—that if she is 'traditional'—he will cease to be sardonic, cruel, distant and strange (the hallmark of Harlequin heroes)," Frenier said. "In this, Harlequin tells wives that if they behave like battered women they will obtain and keep a good marriage."

Frenier, who teaches a course in gender role socialization, said she thinks women look to romantic novels for support of their ideas of how love and marriage should work. "Harlequins offer an explanation of and cure for the frustrations of modern marriage," she said. "Specifically, I think the reader is getting guidelines on how to cope with marriage to a stranger in a world in which men and women are not only socialized to be as different as possible from each other, but also to have very different expectations of marriage."

Frenier began to examine romantic fiction a few years ago when she decided to trace the development of anti-feminist

attitudes among women. "I chose to look for the traditional image in the obvious place—the American media. While those media have been castigated by feminists for the way they portray women, there have been no studies that concentrate on the elements in media portrayal which make the traditional role alluring," she said.

While the basic formula for Harlequin novels has remained the same over the years, some of the books are getting sexier as a result of the Sixties sexual revolution, Frenier said her findings indicate.

In 1973 the Canadian publisher Harlequin Enterprises began marketing a series of more sophisticated, sexier books called "Harlequin Presents." And to keep its established audience satisfied, the tamer "Harlequin Romance" novels are

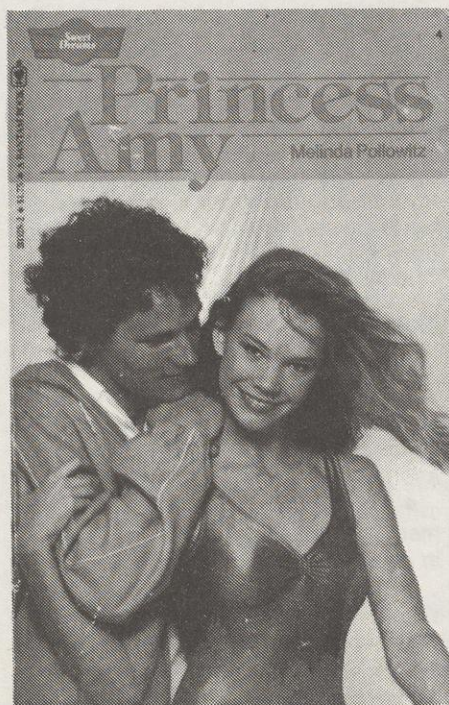
published at the rate of a dozen every month.

In both types of Harlequin novels, the formula dictates the plot: girl meets man; girl gets man; girl loses man; and girl gets man for keeps.

Notice it is "girl" instead of "woman." That's because the formula dictates the hero to be older, more worldly and sophisticated, more experienced sexually, and richer, according to Frenier.

It is essential in romantic novels for men to have superficial power over women because women are seen as having the most powerful of weapons—their sexuality. "Women [in the novels] have to be so weak and so young and so all-that-stuff because if they had equal status, women would be much more powerful,"

**Continued on page 31**



The teen series, typified by the Sweet Dreams title at left, have been called "training bras" for the more suggestive adult romances, such as those published by Harlequin at right.



*Disturbed at the proliferation of romance series in the schools,  
a coalition encourages quality materials for classrooms*

## Coalition Protests Selling Sexism

On June 17 representatives of the National Education Association (NEA), *Ms.* magazine and various sex and race equity organizations, including CIBC, met with 26 editors of Scholastic Book Service, Inc. They came to express concern that Scholastic was marketing sexist, low-quality children's books in the nation's schools.

The meeting was prompted by Scholastic's publication and school distribution of the Wildfire series of romances for ten- to fourteen-year-old girls and of a magazine with very similar content and the same title. In the last *Bulletin*, Elaine Wagner described the successful protest which led to the discontinuation of the magazine; the publication of the Wildfire books, however, was in no way affected.

Those concerned with sex and race equity wished to suggest to Scholastic editorial procedures to avoid the publication of other sexist materials and to assure bias-free books in the future. The group's recommendations to Scholastic appear in the accompanying box.

Before ending the meeting, Scholastic spokesperson Claudia Cole agreed that many of the recommendations were valid and assured the group that a time-line for implementing some of the recommendations would be prepared.

However, repeated attempts to learn of Scholastic's follow-up action went unanswered. When there was still no response by September, the group that had met with the Scholastic staff called for the formation of a coalition of organizations. The purpose of this coalition will be to alert teachers to the content of the books sold by Scholastic and other publishers through school book clubs.

The coalition has issued the following statement:

We the undersigned are disturbed by a new development in school book services. These services are distributing pre-teen and teenage romances which are of inferior literary quality and written to formula, and perpetuate sexist stereotypes and values. Scholastic Book Service, Inc. began publishing the Wildfire series of teenage romances in 1980. The books are aimed at ten- to fourteen-year-old girls. Because of their mass market appeal, many other publishing companies are following suit. Xerox Education Publications, Inc. is offering selections from several other romance series—the Sweet Dreams series of Bantam and First Love series of Simon & Schuster—modeled on the highly successful Wildfire books.

By distributing these books through the schools, Scholastic and Xerox legitimize

their contents as appropriate educational materials and thereby exacerbate the negative effects of stereotypes on students. Students, who receive these books from a school-approved book club, and their parents will inevitably perceive the books as having the approval of the educational community. Because of their long standing trust in the services provided by Scholastic and Xerox, teachers could become an unwitting salesforce for a series of books which they might not find acceptable were they familiar with their contents.

We find the promotion of these books in a classroom setting questionable at best for the following reasons.

1. They teach young girls that their primary measure of self-worth is in their attractiveness and ability to secure a boyfriend. The relentless emphasis on appearance reinforces conformity and feelings of inadequacy in young women.

2. By stressing romance as the central concern in these girls' lives, the books devalue relationships among girls and encourage competition among girls.

3. The books discount the possibility of non-romantic friendships between young women and men based on mutual interests and respect.

4. Most of the adult female and male role models in these books are stereotypical and limiting: mothers focus almost entirely on their family roles and fathers on their paid work.

5. The protagonists for the most part lack social concerns, future aspirations or adventurousness, thus reinforcing a traditional stereotype of women as passive, performing limited functions in a male-defined world.

6. Because of the virtual absence of people of color; disabled people; people from working class backgrounds; people from a variety of family structures, for example, single-parent or extended families; lesbians and gay men; and older

### Suggestions to Scholastic

- Establish on-going, in-house awareness training for those responsible for reviewing and editing Scholastic offerings.

- Establish an outside advisory panel with expertise in "catching" the subtleties of sexism/racism in materials.

- Establish a permanent internal review division of Third World and women specialists qualified and responsible for criticizing materials for race/sex/etc. bias.

- Conduct on-going staff development and supervise review processes in all departments.

- Continue the use of outside consultants for awareness training and review of pre/post production materials.

- Develop a more extensive set of guidelines to assist editors in selecting bias-free stories and articles.



people (not even grandparents are included), the series promotes white, middle-class, two-parent, small-town family life as the *only desirable* norm. By implication, other life styles and members of other social groups may be regarded as deviant or less valuable.

A group of concerned parents and educators has already met with representatives of Scholastic to protest the inclusion of these materials in the book club offerings and to recommend ways in which Scholastic might broaden its selections and train its staff in the evaluation of their publications for sexism and racism. This meeting took place on June 17, 1981. It is Scholastic's failure to respond in a meaningful way that has prompted this statement.

As parents and educators, we charge Scholastic and Xerox with abusing their right to distribute books in schools and with abusing the trust placed in them by the educational community. We strongly recommend that they immediately reexamine their policy regarding the selection of materials for their book club offerings.

The national coalition we are forming will monitor the situation and calls on parents, teachers and librarians to urge that books used in the classroom or sold through school systems be free of stereotypes and bias.

*Statement drawn up September 15 at a meeting held in New York City School District 3 by representatives of the following organizations:*

American Federation of Teachers,  
Coalition of Labor Union Women;  
Barnard College/Columbia University,  
Office for Disabled Students;  
Council on Interracial Books for Children;

Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York;

New York City Board of Education, Office of Equal Opportunity, Sex Desegregation Program Community School District 2, the National Origins/Sex Equity Project and the Gifted Talented Program; Community School District 3, the Basic Skills Program;

New York University, Race Desegregation Assistance Center;  
Organization of Asian Women;  
Rutgers University, Consortium for Educational Equity;

Women With Disabilities United;  
Women's Action Alliance, Non-Sexist Child Development Project.

Individuals and organizations wishing to join the Coalition may write to Coalition, c/o CIBC, 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.

#### Lust for Love Continued from page 29

she said. "In fact in these novels sexually attractive women are so powerful they must be controlled by extremely dominant men and their power must be undercut as much as possible."

Harlequin heroines are so innocent they are usually unaware they are using their powerful artillery. "While portrayed as powerless, usually small, young and naive . . . they often cause their heroes to lust, force their heroes to love, inflict pain upon their heroes and win their heroes' hands in marriage," Frenier explained.

"The traditional unmarried woman was supposed to be disinterested in sexuality and the virgins in the early 1970's Harlequins were disinterested," she said. "In contrast, the virgins in these new sexier novels lust and their lust is not only central to the novels, but I suspect it is the reason for their rising popularity . . . [but] basically Harlequin heroines still reject premarital sex."

In novels by women, heroes have either been devils or angels, she said. In Harlequins they are always devils to be softened by an innocent young woman.

This is made obvious by the "marvelously malevolent" names given to Harlequin heroes, Frenier said. Among her favorites are "Devil Haggard" who is the true love of "Oriell Millstock" and "Damien Savage and Kate Darwood" who we met in the first paragraph.

While reading formula fiction and knowing that even Devil Haggard can be tamed by the right woman may be unappealing to some readers, Harlequin fans like the advance knowledge, Frenier said.

"I think people who read them like the predictability, they like knowing more than the protagonist," she said. "They like the happy endings; it must be soothing."

The article above by Pat Kaszuba appeared in the *Twin Cities Reader*. When asked to comment on the romance series for young readers, Mariam Frenier made the following statement.

Series like *Sweet Dreams* and *Wildfire* are training bras for future Harlequin readers. While the differences between these teen romances and Harlequins make them alluring to young girls, the similarities reinforce the same old myths and stereotypes fostered by Harlequins

and other romance fiction.

The differences: Harlequin protagonists are seventeen to twenty-eight years old; those of *Sweet Dreams* and *Wildfire* are sixteen or seventeen. Harlequin heroes are usually thirty-five; teen heroes, seventeen to twenty. Harlequin heroes are sardonic brutes; teen heroes, sweet guys who help with the dishes. Typically, Harlequin protagonists are orphans; teen protagonists have close and loving mothers. And teen protagonists are more virginal than Harlequin's. They kiss, sometimes more than one boy, but the kisses are gentle—if it's the right boy—and lead to no fondling of breasts or thighs. Blessedly, these teen romances are not pornographic; that is, their protagonists do not engage in punishing kisses, steely grips and bruises as characters do in adult romances.

I would applaud these differences—with the exception of the same insistence that the hero be older than the "heroine"—if they didn't operate to lull the readers into dreams about boys and marriage which have little to do with reality. Where are the macho boys, where the pregnant girls, where the difficult male-female relationships? Where is any preparation for living in the real world of women and men?

#### Love Is a Career

The striking similarity between Harlequins and the teen romances is their stress on love as the career for girls and young women. A teen protagonist, like a Harlequin protagonist, subsumes herself and her interests to Him and His interests.

Dates and kisses and boyfriends and everlasting love are of primary importance. If the teen protagonists even think in terms of careers—and one-half of the heroines I encountered did not—they subordinate those careers to their interest in boys. In addition, their mothers do not serve as career women role models. (Only one mother in my reading was visibly in the work force and she had "a job in a day school" but was not a teacher.)

The message of the teen romances is clear: if you want to be happy, young woman, find yourself a man. Do not fritter away your time pursuing a career. Love is what you want and once you find it, love will be forever and all-fulfilling. And once you are older and immersed in love, when you want periodically to refresh your image of true bliss, you'll be well trained to dip into Harlequins and Rosemary Rogers. □



## Klan Recruitment Efforts Increase

Ku Klux Klan recruitment of children has already been noted with alarm (see Vol. 11, No. 8). Reports of the distribution of Klan hate-literature at schools across the nation and of student activity supporting the Klan are increasing. Recent incidents include:

- In Durham, North Carolina, a cross was burned at half-time during a game between Black and white high schools.

- In College Park, Maryland, several adult Klan members visited a local high school to recruit students. (They claim to have signed up 100 students and plan to recruit elsewhere.) Youth Corps applications were also circulated in a St. Mary County high school. In Hartford County, a mock job application form slurring Blacks circulated among local high school students, and both teachers and students repeatedly received abusive phone calls from self-identified Klansmen.

- A flyer was circulated in a Jackson, Mississippi, high school urging teachers and administrators to "suspend as many blacks as they can."

- In Marion County, California, nine members of a high school football team were suspended after inserting "K-K-K" into a school cheer.

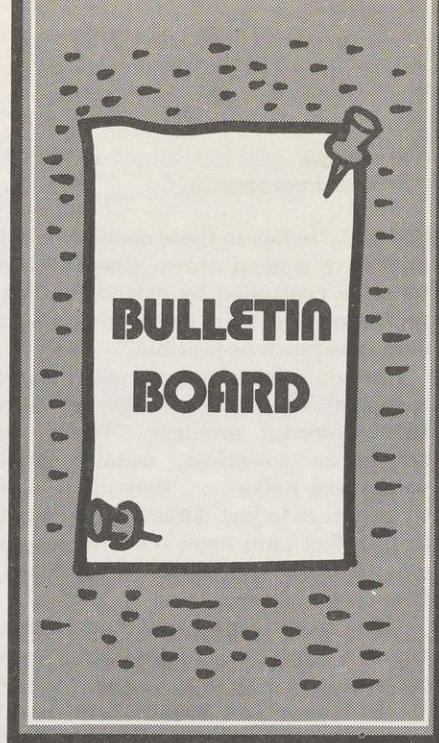
- In public schools in northwest Alabama, KKK recruiting pamphlets were discovered taped to athletic lockers and tacked on bulletin boards.

- In Contra Costa, California, white students who befriended Chicano and Asian American classmates have been the special target of KKK attacks.

- Following an article in the *Cleveland Press* that described a successful desegregation program at JFK High School, a white student identified in the article received an anonymous letter from the KKK depicting a Black man being lynched.

Equally alarming is the fact that teachers and youth workers are also being identified as KKK members. In Chicago, Illinois, a high school teacher resigned in the wake of the furor caused when several ten-year-old Black students reported that he called them "little niggers," "bitches," "whores," and "prostitutes," and called himself a "card-carrying member of the KKK." A Scout troupe leader in Ceres, California, was recently revealed to be a Klan member, as was a Brownie leader in Connecticut.

Recognizing the need to alert parents and educators to the dangers of Klan in-



volvement in schools and other activities for children, CIBC has been working with two teacher organizations—the National Education Association and the Connecticut Education Association—to develop an anti-Klan school curriculum (see below). In addition, CIBC has joined the National Anti-Klan Network (NAKN) and is helping to organize the group's Education Committee. The NAKN is focusing this fall and winter on "the Next Generation," with educational efforts in high schools and colleges. The NAKN will serve as a resource center for speakers, including victims of Klan violence, and anti-Klan materials. Individuals and organizations are urged to join the NAKN Education Committee and to organize teach-ins and distribute NAKN literature in their communities. For more information write the NAKN, P.O. Box 10500, Atlanta, Ga. 30310, or telephone (404) 221-0025.

## Curriculum on KKK Now Available

A curriculum about the Ku Klux Klan was introduced at the annual conference of the National Education Association (NEA) held in Minneapolis this past July. Developed by the Council on Interracial Books for Children in cooperation with the NEA and the Connecticut Education Association, the curriculum is entitled "Violence, the Ku Klux Klan and the Struggle for Equality." The informational and instructional kit is designed for use in junior and senior high school, an age

level at which the Klan has been directing recruiting efforts, as well as in other settings where people seek to learn more about the history and resurgence of the Klan.

The 72-page curriculum contains a comprehensive Background Information section plus 11 detailed lesson plans and a variety of classroom activities covering such topics as The Birth of the Klan, The Beginnings of White Supremacy, The Klan in the 1920's, The Process of Scapegoating, The Klan Today and Countering the Klan. An annotated Bibliography and Glossary are also included. "The material is designed to counter Klan propaganda and to provide information about the Klan that is not included in any textbook," noted Council staff member Ruth Charnes during the presentation of the curriculum at Minneapolis. She noted that it is particularly important to provide teachers and students with factual information about the Klan and its activities "because the Klan trades on misinformation, half-truths and a lot of myths."

The curriculum acknowledges the problems inherent in dealing with a subject of this nature and includes a section entitled The Emotional Climate of the Classroom. "You need a sensitive, concerned, dedicated teacher to present this kind of information," said John Leeke, NEA staff coordinator for the project, at the presentation.

The three groups had independently begun work on anti-Klan material last year. In February, 1980, the NEA established a Special Committee on Student Behavior Reflecting Racial and Ethnic Prejudice; it recommended NEA develop curriculum materials dealing with the KKK, neo-Nazi and other extremist groups.

The Council's interest began last spring during the preparation of an article, "Whitewashing White Racists: *Junior Scholastic* and the KKK" (*Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 5). The Council sought classroom materials to recommend to counter misinformation that had appeared in *Junior Scholastic*. Finding that no such materials existed, the Council began work on lesson plans.

The CEA became involved in preparing a curriculum in September of that year after a Klan group held a rally and cross-burning in the small Connecticut town of Scotland. "Teachers called CEA for information about the Klan when their students began asking questions they couldn't answer," said



Dimples Armstrong, CEA representative at the Minneapolis conference. "We decided to prepare materials to help them."

In January, 1981, the three groups joined forces to produce the curriculum. Copies are available from the Council for \$4.95 prepaid (see inside back cover).

## Resolution Cites "Words by Heart"

A resolution on "Bias in Children's Books" was adopted at the annual meeting of the Women's Division, Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, held in New York City last April. Seventy-two regional conferences in the U.S. are mandated to implement the resolution, which reads as follows:

### Bias in Children's Books

WHEREAS children's books reflect the biases of the society and tend to thereby perpetuate them, a recent example being a children's book titled, *Words by Heart*, written by Ouida Sebestyen which purports to narrate the hardships faced by a Black family in the early 20th Century, but fails to recognize the political, racial and social realities that shape the Black experience in America;

WHEREAS the story distorts the meanings of struggle in the Black community, it promotes the myth of passivity, submissiveness, and complicity as an answer to oppression;

WHEREAS the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) has recently published an in-depth analysis of the book, presenting the perspectives and criticism of Black authors and church people, citing the book for distortion and racism [see Vol. 11, No. 7];

WHEREAS, *Words by Heart* has been given exceptional national prominence and has received the International Reading Association 1980 Children's Book Award, was selected as a 1980 Notable Book by the American Library Association, was chosen as the first children's book ever to be condensed by the Reader's Digest, and is presently scheduled for publication in paperback by Bantam Books July 1981.

Be it therefore resolved that:

The Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries send letters to the book's publisher, Atlantic, Little Brown, the Readers Digest, the International Reading Association, calling on them to use anti-racist and bias-free guidelines

when selecting children's books in the future.

The Women's Division call on United Methodist Women to evaluate children's books in society and in the church to determine if they are promoting racist stereotypes and biases.

The Women's Division provide a wider distribution of CIBC guidelines and work to determine procedures for such evaluation.

The Women's Division call upon United Methodist Women to encourage public librarians and school librarians to develop workshops and seminars to assist persons to identify stereotypes and biases in children's books and to introduce non-stereotypical literature.

The Women's Division call upon appropriate boards and agencies within the church to evaluate and monitor church school materials to ensure that they are bias-free.

## Anti-Bias School Plan

In April, 1978, the [Framingham, Mass.] school system was cited by the state Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity for sex and cultural stereotyping in instructional material. In response, the school committee's policy subcommittee has developed a policy governing this issue.

The policy was passed 4-2 by the school committee in the face of a request for a delay by the Framingham Teachers' Association (FTA). Patricia Nevins, FTA representative, said she was "worried about the effect the policy will have on teacher load."

The policy states:

- each teacher and administrator will be responsible for reviewing, for sex/race stereotyping, any material he/she orders.

- a written summary of sex/race stereotyping content of any books being considered for district-wide adoption must be submitted to the deputy superintendent by the adoption committee.

- a written accounting of any text ordered in a quantity of 30 or more for any grade level adoption must be submitted to the principal by teachers involved in the selection of the text.

- an annual review of the most commonly used instructional materials in each department will be conducted by each school and submitted to the deputy superintendent.

Reprinted from *Integrateducation*, Jan.-Aug., 1980.

## Quality Counts

Continued from page 19

Medical Center, a hospital serving children from all races, at all levels of academic and social ability, from all backgrounds.

The first time I distributed the books, I also selected them. I was careful to include a wide selection of "high interest" books about animals, sports, series romance, jokes, crafts, TV tie-ins and so on. About half, however, were the sort of books librarians hope to see children read—well written, popular literature with careful character development, themes and styles. There were titles by Eloise Greenfield, Sharon Bell Mathis, Beverly Cleary, Mildred Taylor, Marilyn Sachs, William Steig, Lucille Clifton, plus some classics, folklore and epics. Although children first picked books from the former category, they invariably only browsed through them before returning to pick titles from the second category to keep. I went to lunch. An hour later when I returned every child was engrossed in a book.

Some time later, I again visited the hospital to distribute books. This time, someone else had picked the books. There were many more TV tie-ins, lots of hi-lo sports titles, plus a few very difficult classics by Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and others. The children picked books only from the former category. They seemed happy in selecting them, but within five minutes, at the most fifteen, nearly every book had been discarded—on the floor, atop a chair—while the children resumed their earlier activities: television, fighting, playing.

## Is There a Moral?

Is there a moral here? I hope so: If we can reach enough children, enough of the time, with enough good books, books that address their concerns, books that touch their lives, books that broaden their world and deepen their understanding, we will have created a cadre of readers, of learners, of thinkers. We will have a chance for a better world. If we fail to do that, if we ply them with trash, we risk living in a nation of television watchers, vacationers and warriors. □

## About the Author

BARBARA ANN PORTE is Children's Services Specialist at the Nassau Library System. Her opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Nassau administration.



In the BOOKSHELF, a regular *Bulletin* department, all books that relate to minority themes are evaluated by members of the minority group depicted.—Editors.

## Where the Elf King Sings

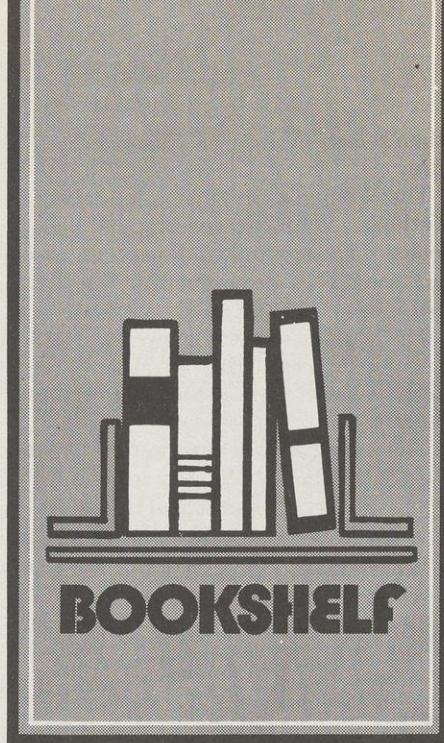
by Judie Wolkoff.  
Bradbury Press, 1980,  
\$7.95, 178 pages, grades 5-9

The sprightly writing holds a reader's attention, as does a way-out, unlikely character—Mrs. King—and an unlikely series of events. The slightly more likely characters in this tale are twelve-year-old Marcie—very smart, brave, sensitive and loving; her six-year-old brother David—super-smart, loving and frightened; Mama—beautiful, pressured but strong; Daddy—an alcoholic vet, traumatized since his best friend was literally blown to bits while they were together in Vietnam; and Grandma—Daddy's uptight, nagging, protective mother.

While Daddy goes on rampages, losing jobs and tearing up their house, Mama works evenings as a waitress. Marcie is in charge of dinners and brother David. Drama runs high as spooky but wonderful Mrs. King enters the children's lives and helps to solve all problems thanks to her habit of hanging out at graveyards and teaching children about nature, reading and good eating in most unorthodox ways.

This mixture of an offbeat fairy godmother and of the realistic problems suffered by Vietnam veterans unfortunately trivializes the problems and sugarcoats the solutions. Vietnam veterans who were maimed by war did not return to be greeted by demonstrators carrying signs reading "Murderers." This was not a tactic used by the peace movement as this book states. Nor is it plausible that Daddy, who still shouts "gook" and other anti-Asian obscenities when he's upset (and who shows no concern at all about the killing of Vietnamese), feels so strongly about the high proportion of U.S. Blacks killed in Vietnam. He even topples a neighbor's Black garden statue, calling it "offensive."

Anyhow, Daddy finally stops drinking, enters a Veteran's Hospital for psychiatric counseling, and turns out okay. (We are relieved that he went for counseling before Reagan's budget cuts eliminate such services.) In fact, he returns home



so "normal" that he tells his gutsy daughter that she's "a beauty" who will "break too many hearts" and tells his son that he's "a genius."

Oh, yes. Grandma turns out to be loving and generous after all, also thanks to the good fairy, Mrs. King. We presume that this family will live happily ever, ever after. [Lyla Hoffman]

## Margaret Mead: A Portrait

by Edward Rice.  
Harper & Row, 1979,  
\$10., 204 pages, grades 7-up

Margaret Mead, perhaps the best known scholar of her generation, took the small, little-known field of anthropology and did much to foster both its scholarly and popular development. Much of what we, the lay world, know of anthropology today is really anthropology viewed through Mead's eyes. It is amazing, therefore, that there is so little written for children about this woman who wrote and did so much.

This work—one of two recent children's books on Mead (see p. 35)—tries to fill this gap, but fails badly. The author is at his best writing about anthropology. His discussions of anthropology when Mead entered the field are excellent, as is his treatment of the South Sea cultures to which Mead devoted much of her life. His

writing on the Manus, a culture that made the leap from the stone age to the 20th Century in 50 years, is especially good.

When the author moves to Mead's personal life, the purported topic of this work, the book suffers. One gets the impression that while the author knows and loves anthropology, he neither knows nor likes Margaret Mead. This is very apparent in his treatment of Mead's marriage to anthropologist Reo Fortune. With no facts to back up his opinions, the author makes such comments as: "There is a minor consolation, if Reo ever enjoys such ironies: Despite his wife's determination to remain 'Miss Mead,' the reviewers, the journals and the cataloguers of his books list her as, 'Mrs. Reo F. Fortune.' Small reward." Later he states, "After the praise heaped upon his wife's books, Reo must feel like a real second fiddle."

Overlooking the fact that two of Mead's husbands were eminent anthropologists, the author writes that viewing "Mead's relationship with her various husbands (she will have three in all) . . . one wonders if [her husbands] may not be merely some kind of drone to her worker bee."

Mead is portrayed as an overpowering, insensitive wife who "loved Samoans more than [her first husband]." At the same time, the author also trivializes Mead and her life. He explains, for example, that fate, not determination, sent her to Samoa and that her need for the exotic, not scholarship, drove her on.

The book has other problems. It seems that the author was unsure of his audience. At one point, for instance, he explains that "automobiles were then not as common as they are now," a rather elementary concept, while later in the book he goes into fairly sophisticated explanations of anthropological techniques. In addition, the present tense is used to refer to past events, which causes confusion.

If this were simply an introduction to anthropology and did not contain the sections on Mead, it would have value; however, as one of the few biographies of Mead for young readers, the book is an insult to both its subject and the reader. [Patricia B. Campbell]



## She Never Looked Back: Margaret Mead in Samoa

by Sam and Beryl Epstein,  
illustrations by Victor Juhasz.  
Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980,  
\$5.99, 64 pages, grades 3-7

This is an easy-to-read introduction to Margaret Mead and her work. Focusing on Mead's first and most famous field work in Samoa, the book describes both Samoan culture as it affected young girls and Mead's efforts to understand that aspect of the culture.

The book is not a biography. Mead's life, other than the time spent in Samoa, is given very little attention, and the complexities and contradictions that were Margaret Mead are rarely even hinted at. In addition, little is included about the field of anthropology other than a short definition and occasional references to the dedication and sincerity of the anthropologist.

What the book does cover and cover very well is *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Taking a view which is primarily non-judgmental, the author uses Mead's experiences as a basis for discussing cultural differences and the need to respect cultures different from one's own. The book also describes the problems of living and working in a different culture and the effort that an outsider must make to be accepted.

A few stereotypes and patronizing conversations about "primitive people" are included in the book, although generally Mead either refutes these comments or is upset and embarrassed by them. In general, Samoa is portrayed as an idyllic place. This unfortunately weakens what could have been a very valuable aspect of the book. The book discusses the differences between female adolescent experiences in Samoa and in the U.S., explaining why the experience is so much less painful and less traumatic in Samoa. Unfortunately, the Samoa of Mead's study seems so far removed from the U.S. that it will be very hard for the young reader to relate to much of the information.

The book is an interesting tale of other lives, other places and other times; it attempts to teach readers respect for other cultures and to pro-

vide insight into the powers of environment in forming "human nature." The excellent illustrations are an asset. *She Never Looked Back* deserves to be read. [Patricia B. Campbell]

## Two Places to Sleep

by Joan Schuchman,  
illustrated by Jim LaMarche.  
Carolrhoda Books (241 First Ave. N.,  
Minneapolis, Minn. 55401), 1979,  
\$4.95, unpagged, grades p.s.-3

Seven-year-old David has blonde hair and freckles. His parents have just gotten a divorce, and David's mother is the one who moved out of the family home to live in an apartment in the city near her office job. David stays with his Dad, by mutual consent of both parents, so he won't have to change schools or suffer any other disruptions in his life. His father has a housekeeper who reassures David that he will learn to cope with his parents' permanent separation.

The book depicts the difficult transition period in David's—and his parents'—life, when David feels insecure about the separation, particularly his separation from his mother. Everyone is especially understanding and accommodating. David's father includes David in cooking meals, makes special breakfasts for him, promises to finish building his bookcase. David's mother spends the entire weekend entertaining David—they fly a kite in the park, go to the movies, eat in a restaurant, play Parcheesi, and, of course, there is the long bedtime story and the reassuring "I love you, David."

By the end of the book, one gets the picture that David will adjust to his two places to sleep. Neither his mother nor father will abandon him. In fact, there are some special rewards. His Mom, David observes, "listens better now than she used to" and she doesn't get angry when he spills his drink in the restaurant.

For the growing number of children whose mothers and fathers decide to separate and divorce and to remain close to their children, sharing the nurturing and child rearing in a sensible and equitable manner, this will be

a book to identify with. The book is also important because it shows the father having the main responsibility for the home and the child. That he has the means to have a day-time housekeeper is another matter; this is definitely a portrayal of an isolated middle-class family. There are no other family members or friends helping out during this difficult period. In a way, there's an irony here. The book is in a sense celebrating the independence of the mother and the ability of all parties to cope after the break-up of the nuclear family. Yet, by concentrating on *only* the nuclear family, it leaves one with a sense of loss. This is a contradiction which the author probably did not intend to convey.

Jim LaMarche's illustrations are soft and warm, just as they are in his previous book *My Daddy Don't Go to Work*. [The Multicultural Project for Communication and Education]

## Pagans in Our Midst

by Andre Lopez.  
Akwesasne Notes (Mohawk Nation  
via Roosevelttown, N.Y. 13683), no date,  
\$6.95, 153 pages, grades 6-up

This book is a selection of 1885-1910 newspaper articles and illustrations about the Six Nations Peoples of three major reservation areas in upper New York State—Mohawk, Onondaga and Seneca. (A Prologue gives a brief historical background.) The Introduction and Foreword constitute an outstanding essay on the nature of racism in general, with particular attention to how it is manifested by white America against the Native population. Although focused on one locale, the book is a microcosm of what was happening throughout the country.

By the end of the 19th century, the "Indian Wars" were over. Generally, those left alive were relocated and forcibly confined to reservations, where they found themselves engaged in a different sort of struggle.

This was the beginning of the era of the missionary and the "educator," who, with the blessing of the BIA, implemented the policy of spiritual and cultural genocide that came to replace previous physical destruction. It is a policy that



has continued, to one degree or another, to the present.

The articles reprinted here must surely cover every device invented by the dominant society to dehumanize the conquered and thereby justify their control. There are half-baked accounts of ceremonial occasions as observed by whites—"Pagan Teachings Mixed Up With Orgies at Onondaga Castle" reads one headline—and of "strange," "cruel," "barbarous" and "weird" customs. A variety of "crimes" are reported: Mitchell Oak is sentenced to 2½ years at Dannemora for marrying a white girl, while the saloon keeper who shot Frank Terrace, a "half-breed" (drunk, of course), in the back, is acquitted. There are land claims and fishing rights battles, attempts to regain sacred and historical objects appropriated by the white man—" . . . it is . . . the hope of the friends of the Iroquois that in time, the relics may be gathered together and preserved by the State of New York. . . ." And always, there is the State's insistence on its jurisdiction over reservation lands. One of the most disturbing things about reading this work is the realization of how very little has changed in a hundred years.

This is a unique and important book. It will help Native People better understand what has happened to us, and why, and what it is we are fighting. For whites, who, for the most part, have absolutely no conception of what it is like to grow up Indian in this country, its value could hardly be overestimated. For undergraduates, secondary and even elementary students, *Pagans in Our Midst* will be an unsurpassed resource. One word of caution to teachers using the book with their classes: Although, as the Foreword states, "The racism is obvious to all who would see," the attitudes em-

bodied here are still so much a part of our everyday lives, that one needs to use the material carefully and thoughtfully. [Doris Seale]

## Bouquets for Brimbal

by J. P. Reading.  
Harper & Row, 1980,  
\$8.95, 186 pages, grades 7-up

*Bouquets for Brimbal* parallels two developing teenage love relationships, one heterosexual and one lesbian. Best friends Macy Bacon and Annie Brimbal have planned for several years to spend a summer during high school working together at a summer stock theatre. Macy works in the props department and is heterosexual; Annie is a talented aspiring actress and has already recognized her attraction to women.

During the summer, Macy becomes involved with Don. Annie, meanwhile, has acted on her attraction to Lola, a director at the theatre. Though Macy is eager to share with Annie her loving feelings about her relationship with Don, she is unable to cope with the fact that Annie is seriously involved with a woman. In her denial of Annie's relationship, Macy does not leave herself open to sharing Annie's joy, and the two friends grow increasingly distant.

By the end of the novel, Macy is directly confronted with her friend's lesbian relationship and is unable to deny its existence. Macy comes to accept Annie's happiness with Lola and recognize her own jealousy and sense of loss. She also realizes that she was very unfair to Annie in giving validity only to her own relationship with Don. The two women then become close again.

The book is good in that it insists that heterosexual readers recognize that other, different but equal relationships occur simultaneously amongst their peers. In addition, the book does not negatively stereotype Annie's lesbian relationship, which is presented as caring, supportive, sensitive and strong. (In fact, Macy's relationship is more stereotyped in that she is often the learner who follows Don's lead.)

The novel is limited because the reader does not get an in-depth picture of Annie's relationship, though we gain much deeper insight into Macy's relationship

with Don. Because the book is written from Macy's perspective, this is inevitable. Thus there is limited support for the lesbian reader who is likely to want more information and details about the nature of Annie and Lola's relationship. There is, however, clear insight into the oppression suffered by lesbians when their relationships are denied or invalidated by their heterosexual "friends."

It should also be noted that both Annie and Macy clearly have access to the privilege of wealth. Macy lives in a "dream-house-beautiful" on Long Island and Annie can afford the financial risk of trying to become an actress in New York City after she graduates from high school. Also, Macy sees her decision to work that summer as reversible if the going gets too hard.

Despite these class issues, I would recommend *Bouquets for Brimbal* because it presents a much-needed balance of both heterosexual and lesbian teenage relationships, while accurately reflecting the imbalance of societal validation conferred on each. [Jan Meryll]

## Waiting for Johnny Miracle

by Alice Bach.  
Harper & Row, 1980,  
\$8.95, 240 pages, grades 7-12

This is a book we would heartily recommend—and cannot. Its story—that of a teenage girl with cancer—is one that is fast becoming a national tragedy. Cancer is now the second greatest killer of children under fifteen in the U.S., and the author, who works with young cancer patients, presents them and their all-too-common situation with straightforward realism.

Becky comes from New Jersey, which the young patients in the cancer ward to which her illness brings her call "Cancer Alley." The world we live in is silently slaying these young people, isolating them in a stark hospital world of their own where they watch their companions die, one by one, in a terrifying, lonely room at the end of the hall. Their talk is full of their struggles to live and details of the treatment they wryly describe as worse than the disease: nausea, hair loss, burning of their veins by chemotherapy.





With all the resourcefulness and pluck of young people, they go through these traumatic daily experiences *and grow*. They shed the illusions they wish their parents would let go of. Instead of denying cancer, they want it acknowledged, and with it, the quality of their lives: their fear and their bravery. Becky and her new friends live full lives; and they help each other to do so, even to the point of arranging a tragi-comic tryst for one of them who will not live to see sixteen. What they cannot control they mock, with a kind of gallows humor. (For Becky's mother, who smokes incessantly, they purchase a button that reads "Cancer Cures Smoking.") They form a society of the knowing, protecting each other by their shared, often cruel realism, from the hurt of the "normal" world when it will not or cannot enter into their emotional reality.

All this genuine drama comes through in the story of Becky's transformation and the maturing of her family when cancer enters their lives. It is an entertaining story, too, which is a feat. But its faults are too serious to overlook. There is no hope in this book, as indeed there probably is little in the cancer ward the author is faithfully describing. The orthodox language of "remission" is used, which is not at all cheering, even if remissions last many years. Remission and/or death may indeed be the lot of many of the children the author knows, yet the fact is that cancer is unpredictable. People do survive it, even if medicine knows no "cure." Conventional and unconventional treatment often produces lasting freedom from the disease, and there are histories of spontaneous regression, *i.e.*, the utter disappearance of symptoms that no treatment can account for.

The author ignores these possibilities and the point to be drawn from cancer survivors: that healing involves more than medication. People have resources of body and spirit that lie outside medical control but that can augment medication, for example, promising work with "attitudinal healing" is now going on with young cancer patients in California. For all her sympathy, the author rules out such healing for her patients and her readers, and she does so by means of a racial stereotype at that. Becky and all the other

knowledgeable white middle-class young people in the cancer ward *know* that laetrile and anything but chemotherapy, radiation and surgery is "quackery." Only José comes from the kind of family that is unscientific enough to seek out a healer. When José rejects the hospital for the healer's herbs and poultices, we know he will not survive. Neither will too many of the other children, unfortunately; but no moral is drawn from their compliance to limited medical treatment that—by itself—is also shown as not saving them. [Joan Kelly]

## Idalia's Project ABC: An Urban Alphabet Book in English and Spanish

by Idalia Rosario.  
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981,  
\$6.95, unpagged, grades p.s.-3

This is more than an alphabet book: it's a bilingual tour through an urban child's sights and experiences. Idalia begins with A in English by *asking* Papo's mother if he can come out to play; Papo is Idalia's *amigo*, providing the Spanish A word. Idalia and Papo play on the *bloque* in front of their brick housing project (*bloque* is commonly used in many urban Spanish-speaking communities). Through language and sharing expe-

riences we join Idalia and Papo in their bicultural world, where the U for unity/unidad is an important concept that bridges the differences between people who live and work together in a community.

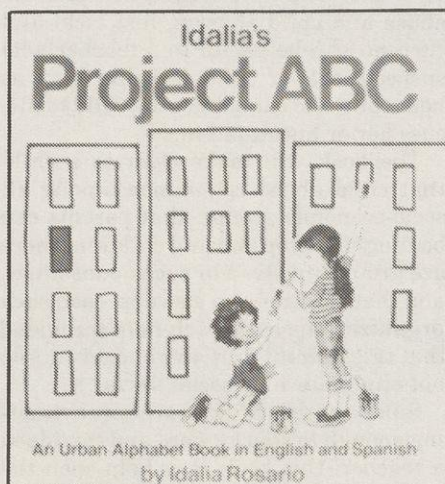
The inhabitants of Idalia's project include Joe, the hard-working janitor; Quincy, an African American neighbor who shares his lantern during a blackout; Quincy's sister Wilma, who as an artist is a role model for Idalia; and Xiomara, who hands out leaflets against pollution. Idalia's father is found cooking in the kitchen and her grandmother is at her sewing machine. Idalia herself takes her share of responsibility by shopping for groceries and helping out at home.

There is realism as well as humor in this book. The text for R notes that the city has rats, which are a health hazard. The author's concerns extend to the people of her community. Solutions to problems are collective; Idalia and Papo join their neighbors to clean up the neighborhood, for instance. And when the children get into trouble when they write some graffiti on a wall, they help Joe the janitor clean it off.

Each letter and illustration offer an opportunity for discussion. Moreover, young readers can be helped to think through the idea of languages being different from each other.

Children who live in housing projects will be able to identify with Idalia's images. Others will be able to explore a new and different experience in culture and language.

The illustrations are clear, honest and charming. They work with the text to create a picture of life in the projects. [Jamila Gastón]



## The Ways of My Grandmothers

by Beverly Hungry Wolf,  
illustrated with photos.  
Morrow, 1980,  
\$9.95, 256 pages, grades 10-up

The author is a young woman of the Blood Division of the Blackfoot Nation. She has written about the lives of Native women, as experienced by her people during the recent past. The book grew out of her interest, as an



adult, in learning about the traditions of the women of her people and in living a more traditional life herself. She also wanted to set down what the grandmothers have to say while they are still with us and to provide some guidance for the young people coming along, many of whom "have a very confused idea of what it is to really be an Indian."

The book may very well be unique; certainly I have never come across anything similar. It is a compilation of history, social life and customs, religious observances, "household hints," recipes, etc. There are stories, taped by the author, about the lives of her mother and grandmother, and others of her Elders, as well as accounts of some of her own experiences in learning how to live in the traditional manner. There is a section called "Myths and Legends of My Grandmothers" plus two groups of photographs collected from family albums, museums and other sources. Apart from its content, which is extremely valuable, one special quality of this work is its depiction of Native people living a happy, normal and fulfilling existence—here are *anybody's* grandmothers, yours, mine, human beings.

There is also the fact that Beverly Hungry Wolf is a very good writer. Her book is interesting, moving, and, here and there, pretty funny. Although an adult title, this is so readable that it could easily be used by and with older children. A lot of nonsense has been written about the women of Native America, past and present. *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is a good antidote. This book is not to be missed. [Doris Seale]

## The Secret in the Garden

written and illustrated  
by Winifred Barnum Newman.  
Baha'i Publishing Trust (415  
Linden Ave., Ill. 60091), 1980,  
\$5., 32 pages, grades p.s.-2

Here's another love-cures-all distortion for children. This time around a "wise old woman's" example of tender-loving-care towards flowers and folks saves the world (or the village). While some may find a white

female savior—aided by a young white girl—preferable to redemption by the other sex, the author's use of the male pronoun for both sexes negates that little nicety.

Until they see the love-light, all the people in the village fight with one another: Blacks, browns, whites and yellows, old and young, fat and thin are competitive and unkind. Teaching children that love is the answer to hate and oppression is a dangerous distortion of reality because:

1. In the U.S. one class, color and sex gains at the expense of others, and children should be made aware of this.

2. People of color (including "Indian chiefs" mentioned in the book) do *not* share equal responsibility for oppression and hate, and to suggest that they do is racist.

3. Love does not change institutional racism or sexism or ageism. Only people struggling together for their rights brings about change, and that is an important message to present to children.

I would love to see the author of this drive telling a Black child and Black parents to smile lovingly when the KKK comes knocking at their door! [Lyla Hoffman]

## Cry Softly! The Story of Child Abuse

by Margaret O. Hyde.  
Westminster Press, 1980,  
\$8.95, 90 pages, grades 5-10

This oversimplified description of child abuse and child abusers, historical and current, can be useful to a teacher who suspects that a child is being hurt at home but who cannot get the child to discuss her or his situation.

The book will make clear to a child that child abuse is common among all socio-economic groups, that parents can be taught to stop abusing children (there are groups involved in such counseling), and that children can also approach such organizations and reach help (provided that this Administration's budget cuts do not eliminate such social services).

Since abused children are rarely trusting enough to step forward and confide in a teacher, this book may help open the conversational door. [Lyla Hoffman]



## The Weaver's Gift

by Kathryn Lasky,  
photographs by Christopher G. Knight.  
Frederick Warne, 1981,  
\$8.95, 58 pages, grades p.s.-up

*The Weaver's Gift* is a rare find. In a text accompanied by excellent photographs, the author describes the process of weaving from lamb to sheep to loom to blanket.

Central to the story is Carolyn Frye, a weaver who raises sheep on her farm. She saves the life of a freezing baby lamb and caringly raises it—and others—to shear for wool. She then skirts (sorts) the wool, washes and cards it. We see the intricate process of spinning the yarn and dyeing it. Finally, we see Carolyn at her loom, creating the weaver's gift, a blanket for the author's toddler son.

The author makes no effort to oversimplify the text, which is extremely well-written and factual and shows deep appreciation and respect for a woman and her trade. The reader gains a clear sense of the step-by-step weaving process. Children will learn not to take a finished product for granted, and their curiosity about other processes of making things will most surely be aroused.

The book has a strong female central character, who is helped by a supportive husband and by Rob Burroughs, a man who has been shearing sheep for over 50 years. Rob is a model of a competent older person who does valuable work.

The book can be read to pre-schoolers or by older children. It can be used for a research project on weaving, or as an example of one woman's productivity and contributions to society. It is a delightful book! [Jan M. Goodman]



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CIBC is a non-profit organization founded by writers, librarians, teachers and parents in 1966. It promotes anti-racist and anti-sexist children's literature and teaching materials in the following ways: 1) by publishing the *Bulletin*, which regularly analyzes children's books and other learning materials for human and anti-human messages; 2) by operating the Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, which publishes reference books, monographs, lesson plans and audio-visual material designed to develop pluralism in schools and in society; 3) by conducting workshops on racism and sexism for librarians, teachers and parents; and 4) by initiating programs that bring to public attention the unrecognized talents of Third World writers and artists. For more information about CIBC and a free catalog of its Resource Center publications, write us at 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.

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