
ber of rewrites, the book, entitled "Iggie's House," was published. School Library Journal damned it as "featherweight sociology." However, while revising "Iggie's House" Blume was writing a much better book, "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," about the emotional turmoil of a girl on the brink of adolescence. Whereas "Iggie's House" had a contrived plot, "Margaret" had no plot other than Blume's own vivid memories of the trials of transition. In keeping with the era of literary candor that had recently dawned even in children's books, Blume decided not to censor those memories. Margaret's thoughts are filled mainly with tremulous anticipation of menstruation. Kirkus Rcvients, a powerful voice in publishing, disliked the theme. Booklist and the Times gave the book favorable but brief comment. School Library Journal called it "realistic" and commented on its "sincerity" but predicted that it would appeal to a limited group; i.e., girls approaching puberty. Blume's third novel, a year later, was a companion piece to "Margaret," telling of the tribulations of a thirteen-year-old boy plagued by sexual stirrings. Again Blume applied a formula of candid description. The book's title, "Then Again, Maybe I Won't," reflects the hero's uncertainty about practically everything. Meanwhile, inspired by a news item about a toddler who had swallowed his family's pet turtle, Blume had written the text for a picture book, which Bradbury declined, with a slight shudder, on the ground that the idea might be catching. Blume submitted the text to E. P. Dutton, where an imaginative editor, Ann Durell, saw in it the climax of a humorous novel. Blime obediently wrote "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing," the rueful lament of a nine-year-old who finds his little brother unbearable. Reviewers liked the book, but it sold only modestly. By 1974, four more Blume novels had been published. None attracted great attention.

But in 1972 Dell had published "Margaret" in paperback, making it widely available to young readers without the intervention of librarians. Suddenly, Blume and her audience found bach other. News that a book describing the ordeal of puberty without mincing words could be had for seventy-five cents spread through every sixth grade in the land, and probably through lower grades, to the dawn of literacy. Demand for "Margaret" continued to grow, and may have been

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increased by the publication, in 1975, of "Forever," a novel that is billed as a book for "Young Adults." Although books about lost virginity are not uncommon for older teen-agers, "Forever" dismayed parents and librarians because Blume's younger fans also rushed to buy it. Book-banners rushed to the ramparts. The controversy helped make "Forever" a best-seller. Since then, Blume has pulalished four "Wore novels, including an adult book, "Wifey," None have had rave reviews. None have been awarded any top prizes. All have been smash hits. Her early books have become steady sellers. The hardcover sales of all her titles total more than a million, but the true measure of her audience is indicated by her paperback sales, which have been estimated at twenty-seven million. That is a staggering figure for children's books. In 1981, the entire population between the ages of five and seventeen was estimated at fortysix million.
On my first exposure to Blume, a few years ago, It turned out to be immune to Blume fever. Her realism struck me as shallow, and I was put off by her knack for observing unpleasant details. Recently, I read her again, determined to find her magic formula, and I am now ready to amend my views. In a Judy Blume book, realism is everything. True, it has no great depth, but it is extraordinarily convincing. True, she includes unpleasant details things we all notice but usually don't mention-yet they increase the credibility that is the source of her magnetic power. Blume's technique might be compared to cinéma vérité. She writes as though filming the landscape of childhood from the eye level of a child. She focusses on nearby objects and immediate events with a child's intense gaze, picking out details that evoke instant recognition. As in a play, dialogue carries the story along. It is colloquial, often funny, and always revealing. Blume doesn't waste words. Her stories are told in the first person-sustained soliloquies that are prodigies of total recall. Each book begins on a note of candor. We have the feeling of reading a secret diary-something the writer intended only for himself. Thus, it seems natural when usually private matters are included. Often, they are things that have to do with the dawning of sex, and though most are quite innocuous it is a shock to see them suddenly exposed in print. The effect is a mesmerizing intimack, which convinces

Blume's readers that she writes the whole truth about what kids think and feel.

The heroine of "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret" is nearly twelve. Her overriding concern is that she won't mature as fast as her friends, though her head is also filled with thoughts about school, the boy who mows the lawn, the question of whether to be Jewish, like her father, or Christian, like her mother, and new social experiences, which include a first party where kissing games are played. As Margaret confides in God (a device that rubs me the wrong way but that I learned to put up with), she gives Him a running account of events during this suspenseful time. She is conscientious, relating everything she deems important. Each detail has meaning. For example, her list of preparations for her first day in a new school tells us how eager and anxious she feels: "On Wednesday night my mother helped me wash my hair. She set it in big rollers for me. I planned to sleep like that all night but after an hour they hurt my head so I took them out. . . I g got up early but I had tronble eating. . . I put on my new blue plaid cotton back-to-school dress. . . . I wore my brown loafers without socks. My mother thought that was dumb." Margaret refused to wear socks because her new friend Nancy had advised her that only drips wear socks with loafers. She amives at school with blistered feet only to find that Nancy was wrong - half the girls are wearing knee socks. The school day moves on. Margaret is thrilled when Nancy slips her a note: "Secret club meets today after school my house -no socks!" At the meeting, Margaret finds the three other members are more worldly than she. Valiantly hiding her lack of sophistication, she subscribes to the club's covenants. Each member must keep a list of boys she "likes," use a secret name, and wear a bra to meetings. Margaret doesn't possess one. Buying it is a momentous experience. So is the club's next meeting, which begins with the members swinging their arms to the chant "We must-we must-we must increase our bust!" Inevitably, Nancy's brother and a friend eavesdrop outside the bedroom door. As the club members file out, the boys recite the chant, hooting with laughter. (Blume know's that one of youth's most terrible trials is vulnerability to cmbarrassment.) Little by little, the club peters out, but not before a meeting that discloses yet

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another twelve-year-old secret-curiosity about the opposite sex. In Margaret's bedroom, with the door closed and a chair shover in front of it, the members examine a purloined copy of an anatomy book. They open it to a diagram of the male body:
"Do you suppose that's what Philip Letoy looks like without his clothes on?" Janie asked.
"Naturally, dope" Nancy said. "He's male, isn't he?".
"Turn the page, Gretchen," Nancy said.
The next page was the male reproductive system. None of us said anything. We just looked until Nancy told us, "My brother looks like that:"
"How do you know?" I asked.
"He walks around naked," Nancy said.
"My father used to walk around naked," Gretchen said. "But lately he's stopped doing it."
"My aunt went to a nudist colony last summer," Janie said.
"What do you suppose they do there?" Gretchen asked.
Tust walk around naked is all My aunt says it's very peaceful."

This scene and others like it are fumny to us but strong stuff to a child reader-the junior equivalent of the tough, tell-it-like-it-is prose of countless adult novels today. It is easy to imagine the surprise of twelve-yearold readers as they recognize themselves caught doing and thinking things they usually conceal from adults. They must feel a chill go up their spine as they wonder "How on earth did she know?" Scenes like these shock some adults, too, who complain that sexuality pervades Blume's books. It does-but only to the degree that it enters most young minds. Except perhaps in "Forever," Blume imparts no illicit knowledge but merely fills in an area of adolescent experience usually left blank in print. And she does it with a bland openness that allows her to retort to crities, "Honi soi qui mal y pense."

Blume is versatile. Her realism


I serves equally well for comic effect in "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing," the swallowed-turtle book. Kids always find breaking taboos and mentioning embarrassments immensely funny. "Fourth Grade Nothing" is a slapstick comedy of family life in which nine-year-old Peter is a victim of circumstance. His hitherto comfortable life comes unhinged when his parents produce a second child, nicknamed Fudge, on whom they foolishly dote. For Peter, life with Fudge is a series of indignities and inconveniences. His view of his little brother is unclouded by sentimentality. Here, for instance, he describes Fudge's third-birthday party:

Ralph anived forst. Hes really fat, And he isn't even four years old. He doesn't say mueh either. He grunts and grabs a lot, though. Usually his mouth is stuffed full of something. ...
Jennie arrived next. She was wearing little white gloves and party shoes. She even carried a pocketbook. Besides that she had on diry jeans and an old sweater. Her mother...said she couldn't do anything with Jenie lately-especially since she had taken to biting....

Sam came last. He carried a big present for Fudge but he was crying... Sam grabbed onto his mother's leg and screamed... We were ready to begin. We had an eater, a biter, and a crier. II thought my mother was slightly crazy for dreaming up the party.

Peter's account of family follies is continued in "Superfudge," in which he is further burdened by a baby sister.
"Superfudge" is a compendium of small-boy humor. The high point may be an episode concerning a lady who is willing to pay Peter for collecting worms. She offers five cents a worm. Peter and his partner in the worm business speculate on what the lady does with them. Worm soup? Worm stew? Worm-and-cheese sandwiches? By the time they get to worm ice cream, they are doubled over with laughter. Worm jokes are not new, but they're surefire, and Blume seems to have a limitless store of similar touchstones of childhood. However, "Superfudge" is better than a mere joke book. The fun lies in Peter's dry wit, yet beneath his veneer of cynicism the reader can detect a warm emotional message as Peter unconsciously reveals his growing fondness for both little pests.

No report on Blume is complete without a look at "Forever," the book for which some critics have not forgiven her. "Forever" is the case history of a teen-ager's affair, in which Katherine, seventeen, deludes herself that she is truly in love and sleeps with

Michael, also seventeen. Blume's de scription of what Katherine and Mi chael do in bed, and what Kathe Tine feels, is a carefully worded answe to questions hygiene manuals fail u address. The affair ends when Katherine falls out of love and realizes emotions can be unreliable. I found thi encounter one of the dullest on tecord but it is easy to see that a naive reade muse find it fascinatingly revealing. I is equally obvious that such a book could kick up quite a storm.

Without the revelations of "Forever" and the small, stunning shocks that Blume sprinkles through her other books like nuts in a brownie, she tmight not have lured so many millions of readers, but she has also won hes audience through honest work, superior craftsmanship, and a talent for recreating an evanescent period of lifethe years from nine to thirteen. She writes about the loneliness of being young; about youtliful secrets-fear, anxiety, longing, guilt. It is rough being a kid, she often says. Her kids are swept along by capricious currents. They struggle to keep their sense of humor, and to keep their heads above water. At the end of the story, they find their feet for a moment of equilibrium as they contemplate the next stage of life. I sympathize with the librarians who hate to see "Tom Sawyer" and the rest of the books we have all loved shoved off the shelves, but the times, not Blume, are to blame for that. I find much in Blume to be thankful for. She isn't scary or sick. She writes clean, swift, unadorned prose. She has convinced millions of young people that truth can be found in a book and that reading is fun. At a time that many believe may be the twilight of the written word, those are things to be grateful for.

IF this year's crop of new books is any indication, publishers don't share the librarians' despair. They've brought out a trenendous variety of tilles-ranging from pop-ups for babies to new editions of the classicsevidently convinced that no matter how kids vote theyll still read good books. Scribners is continuing a series, begun several years ago, that repints beautiful editions of the classics, with the original illustrations. This year's volumes are "Robinson Crusoe," illustrated by N. C. Wyeth (\$17.95), and Kenueth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows," Illustrated by Emest H. Shepard (\$17.95). Viking has a rival edition of "The Wind in the Wil-
lows," illustrated by John Burningham ( $\$ 15.75$ ). Those who were brought up on Shepard will like him best, but Burningham is also very good. The prices of these books give a clue to why mass-market and paperback publishers are gaining so much ground. A fairly small shelf of hardcover books for children can easily cost hundreds of dollars. Even a single picture book is not the casual purchase it once was, but for that reason it might be an even more important and welcome gift. Here, then, are notes on books I've liked, offered with confidence that there are many Christmas shoppers fortunate enough to have ardent young readers in mind.

The first list is a selection of picture books for children from lap size to seven or eight years old:

Popular Nursery Rhymes (Grosset \& Dunlap; \$8.95). A generous helping of Mother Goose enhanced by explanations of the origins of her sometimes bafling verses. Best of all, there are more than two hundred classic illustrations, ranging from very early ones to the work of such masters as Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway. It is great luck to find so much in one handsome book.

Who Sank the Boat?, written and illustrated by Pamela Allen (Coward, McCann; $\$ 10.95$ ). Five friendsa cow, a donkey, a sheep, a pig, and a mouse-decide to go rowing in a very small boat. As each climbs aboard, disaster grows more imminent. The idea is funny, the pictures are splendid, and the easy text is just right for the very young.

The Wild Baby Goes to Sea, by Barbro Lindgren, illustrated by Eva Eriksson, adapted from the Swedish by Jack Prelutsky (Greenwillow; $\$ 9.50$ ). There's no holding the Wild Baby once that raffish tyke from Sweden takes a notion to do something. This time, he salls off in a wooden box. Waves and monsters terrify his fainthearted crew, but the indomitable Baby finds each danger glorious fun. Other wild babies, wild motherseven wild grandmothers-will be equally amused.

Grandra's Great City Tour: An Alphabet Book, written and illustrated by James Stevenson (Greenwillow; $\$ 10.50$ ). Our old friends Louie, Mary Ann, and Grandpa arrive via Alligator Air Lines to find New York Amazingly transformed into an Alphabetical Adventure. Each scene has so much to figure out it may take a child until Easter-at which

Lime he can read another book by Ste- 1 venson.

The Great Big Espectally Beantinul Easter Egg, written and illustrated by James Stevenson (Greenwillow; $\$ 10.50$ ) An especially funny new story told by laid-back Grandpa, who is always one jump ahead of Mary Ann and Lovie. It concerns a trip to the Frammistan Mountains, home of a bird that lays the world's greatest eggs. Braving bears, blizzards, and sea monsters, Grandpa never loses his cool, and Stevenson never runs out of surprises.

Angelina Ballerina, by Katharine Holabird, Hlustrated by Helen Craig (Potter; \$5.95). A pretty book about a little mouse who dances all day long, driving her parents mad until they decide to send her to Miss Lilly's ballet classes. Angelina is charming in a tutu; her story is gentle and pleasing.

The Pinate Who Tried to Captore the Moon, by Dennis Haseley, illustrated by Sue Truesdell (Harper \& Row; \$8.95). A totally weird tale about a ferce pirate whose wicked deeds know no end until he attempts. the wickedest of all-capturing the moon. Funny-ugly drawings carry out an imaginative idea that leaves a moonlike afterglow.

The Adventures of Pinocchio, by Carlo Collodi, adapted by Stephanie Spinner, illustrated by Diane Goode (Random House; $\$ 6.95$ ). The story of the mischievous puppet who learns virtue the hard way wears wonderfully well. This abbrevated version makes fast, exciting reading for younger children who aren't up to the full text. It is well illustrated. (A complete "Pinocchio," for older readers, is listed in the next section.)

Matmda Jane, by Jean Gerrard, Illustrated by Roy Gerrard (Farrar, Straus \& Giroux; $\$ 10.50$ ). This story, in verse, of a little English girl's trip to the seashore is a vehicle for Roy Gerrard's absorbing, slightly eerie watercolors of busy Victorian scenes. His realism is accompanied by tricks of distortion that impart a dreamlike atmosphere.

Aefx Remembers, by Helen $V$. Griffith, illustrated by Donald Carrick (Greenwillow; $\$ 10.50$ ). One night, Alex, the dog, stares into the sky. He sees strange shapes. Mysterious feellings stir inside him, and he howls. "You're remembering," the cat explains. This brief story captures something that haunts everyone on moonlit nights.

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The Random House Book of Poetry for Children, selected by Jack Prelutsky, illustrated by Arnold Lobel (Random House; \$13.95). Thanks to long experience of reading poetry aloud to children, Jack Prelutsky knows what pleases them: funny poems, surprising poems, poems filled with rhythm and witty rhymes-above all, first-rate poems. There are more than five hundred in this lovely book. Eyery page is ornamented by Arnold Lobel's superb pictures.
A Medieval Feast, written and illustrated by Aliki (Crowell; \$9.95). In olden days in Europe, word of a royal visit set off immense preparations. Everyone on the host's estate got busy. Liyely scenes of hunting, hawking, baking, brewing, and much more are shown in pictures that glow like stained glass. The text is slim, but the illustrations are sumptuous.

HERE is some excellent reading (or reading aloud) for youngsters from about seven-at the beginning of the list-up to ten or twelve:
Skunk Lane, written and illustrated by Brom Hoban (Harper \& Row; \$8.95). Jarvef, a young skunk, is content to lounge around the bouse until his parents gently suggest he set out on his own. It is rough at first, but Jarvey winds up drinking tree-frog grog with some banjo-strumming rac-coons-and cleaning up his new home in the morning. A delightful story, with nice black-and-white illustrations.
The Knight of the Golden Planv, by Mollie Hunter, Illustrated by Marc Simont (Harper \& Row; $\$ 10.95$ ). The tale begins, "There was a boy once, who decided to be a knight -a strong and fearless knight." He becomes Sir Dauntless and rides a black charger through dark forests and dreadful dangers to aid lovely Dorabella, a maiden with moon-gold hair. Written in rich, exciting language, and with lovely illustrations, this is a perfect little book.
The Saga of Erik the Viking, by Terry Jones, illustrated by Michael Foreman (Schocken; \$15.95). Terry Jones, of Monty Python, is a scholar and magician who knows how to take old tales apart and put them back together better than ever. His Vikings, having set sail for the edge of the world, find marvels and perils greater than any imagined before- and more fun to read about. Michael Foreman's illustrations are magical, too.
The Adventures of Pinocchio, by C. Collodi, translated from thell

Italian by M. L. Rosenthal, illustrated by Troy Howell (Lothrop, Lee \& Shepard; \$16.50). Pinocchio springs to life looking younger than ever in a
lively new translation, which celebrates the book's hundredth birthday. The entire text is here, in thirty-six engrossing chapters.
Farr's Fark, by Leon Garfeld, illustrated by S. D. Schindler (Doubleday; $\$ 10.95$ ). A homeless boy shares a crust with a hungry dog, finds a golden key tied to the dog's neck-and we're off through snowy London to search for the door it will open. A vividly told tale, with an ending as warm and delicious as a Christmas pudding.

A Lamp for the Lambchops, by Jeff Brown, illustrated by Lynn Wheeling (Harper \& Row; \$9.95). The Lambchops are a pleasant family who adjust well when their son, Stanley, discovers that an old teapot found on the beach contains a playful young genie eager to get out and grant wishes. It couldn't have happened to nicer people, and that is what makes this such a good story.
Gulliyer's Travels, by Jonathan Swift, illustrated by David Small (Morrow; \$10.50). Swift's dazzling fantasy in which big becomes little and little becomes big remains one of the best adventure stories ever written. This attractive edition contains Gulliver's wisits to Lilliput and Brobdingnag, illustrated with strong pen-and-ink drawings.

God, Mrs. Muskrat and Aunt Dot, by Isabelle Holland (Westminster; $\$ 10$ ). After Aunt Dot, her guardian, sends her beloved dog to the pound, eleven-year-old Rebecca is angry at everyone-God included. She turns to fantasy friends, a motherly muskrat, and an eccentric cat lady for comfort and advice. Isabelle Holland tackles large and fascinating questions-for example, Do dogs have souls? -and handles them beautifully in an unusual, quite wonderful story.

HERE is nonfiction on assorted subjects. The first four books are for readers of ten or twelve, and the three others for readers in their teens:

Busy Buas, by Ada and Frank Graham, illustrated by D. D. Tyler (Dodd, Mead; \$9.95). The authors take a close look at the life and times of fourteen insect species, showing the varied and (to human beings) peculiar ways insects make their livings. The text on each species is brief, clear, and $\mid$

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interesting. The black-and-white illustrations are precise, and help make this a splendid introduction to bugland.
Balloon Trip, written and illustrated by Huck Scarry (Prentice-Hall; $\$ 10.95$ ). Huck Scarry's fine sketches and chatty, informative text describe how balloons were invented, how they work, and how it feels to drift through the sky, and even, as once happened to him, come down with a crash. A particularly interesting book for the tech-nical-minded.
Unhidoling, by Alvin Schwartz, illustrated by Sue Truesdell (Lippincott; $\$ 9.95$ ). Propounding riddles and solving them (unriddling) is an ancient sport, and is still fun. Here is a fine collection, taken from American folklore, that may solve the riddle of what to give a certain nine- or ten-year-old on your list.

The Double Life of PocahonTas, by Jean Fritz, illustrated by Ed Young (Putnam; \$9.95). All that is usually remembered of Pocahontas is that she saved John Smith's life. In truth, she was a pawn in the cruel confict between her people and the English settlers of Jarnestown. Sketching her brief, tragic life, Jean Fritz removes the romantic varnish from legend and turns history into engrossing reality.
The Amateur Naturalist, by Gerald Durrell, with Lee Durrell (Knopf; $\$ 22.50$ ). Gerald Durrell, who is noted for witty books about pursuing animals in exotic places, provides a practical guide for younger collectors. He gives advice on how to study wildlife anywhere-cellar, attic, marsh, meadow, or wherever else you may find yourself. With reams of information and beautiful illustrationsphotographs and drawings in color and in black-and-white-this book can transform almost any excursion into a field trip.
Sky Above and Worlds Beyond, by Judith Herbst (Atheneum; $\$ 14.95$ ). The trouble with most books about astronomy is that they are written by astronomers. The author of this one is an amateur in love with the stars who is able to describe our universe in an informal style that communicates her own excitement. Illustrated with photographs and drawings in black-andwhite.
Dinosaurs: An Lleustratid HisTory, by Edwin H. Colbert (Hammond; $\$ 30$ ). Dr. Colbert, a paleontologist of world renown who helped create the dinosaur halls at the Ameri-
can Museum of Natural History, brings together absolutely everything a dinosaur enthusiast could want to know in this dinosaur-size book. Superb color and black-and-white illustrations, taken from many sources, whet our curiosity, making it easier to tackle a dryly scientific but very interesting text.
$1 \begin{aligned} & \text { HREE novels for readers of ten } \\ & \text { or twelve: }\end{aligned}$
War Comes to Willy Freeman, by James Lincoln Collier and Christo-pher Collier (Delacorte; \$12.95). Willy, a black girl, is freed from slavery when her father enlists in the rebel army during the American Revolution. He is killed, and Willy's mother is dragged off by the British, leaving Willy alone in a tumultuous time. As she tries to find her mother, Willy risks being again enslaved. A glimpse of history which shows how fragile freedom is.

Dan Alone, by John Rowe Townsend (Lippincott; \$9.95). One of those truly satisfactory British adventure tales about a boy fending for himself in Dickensian slums while eluding pious relatives who would like to consign him to an orphanage. The setting is a grim English town in the nineteentwenties. Dan's search for his father is a roller coaster of suspense.

Behind the Attic Wall, by Sylvia Cassedy (Crowell; \$11.95). An old mansion echoes with disembodied voices, and Maggie, the unwilling ward of her eccentric great-aunts, feels she must find their source. Her search and discovery make a first-rate ghost story. The portrait of Maggie, an alienated child defying a hostile world, is unforgettable. A beautifully written, very touching story.

