Against the Grain
Volume 22 | Issue 5

November 2010

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Roxanne Spencer
Western Kentucky University

Jack W. Montgomery
Western Kentucky University, jack.montgomery@wku.edu

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Recommended Citation
Spencer, Roxanne and Montgomery, Jack W. (2010) "Wandering the Web-"A-Wandering through Children's and Young Adult Literature Blogs", Against the Grain: Vol. 22: Iss. 5, Article 44.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5677

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Wandering the Web — “A-wandering through Children’s and Young Adult Literature Blogs”

by Roxanne Spencer (Educational Resources Center, Western Kentucky University Libraries)

Column Editor: Jack G. Montgomery (Coordinator, Collection Services, Western Kentucky University Libraries)

Column Editor’s Note: Ms. Roxanne Myers Spencer is Associate Professor and Coordinator for Western Kentucky University’s Educational Resources Center. From 2003-2008, Ms. Spencer was co-representative in an exchange program with teachers at a private P-12 school near Barcelona, Spain, coordinating the development of their primary school English language school library collection. Her 2005 article, published in Collection Building, “Developing Library Classroom Children’s Collections in English for a Catalan Primary School,” won a Highly Commended Paper recognition by Emerald Publishing. She has been the Children’s Literature Scholar for Prime Time Family Reading Time Program with the Warren County (KY) Public Library, and her research interests include bibliotherapy/reading guidance, instructional design and libraries, and children’s literature. Ms. Spencer reviews Young Adult fiction and nonfiction and multimedia for School Library Journal. She also teaches collection management as an adjunct in WKU’s Library Media Education Program and has her students “tweet” micro-reviews of their children’s literature selections assignment on Twitter. — JM

Children’s and young adult literature blogs vary as much in style and content as the genres and subgenres of titles they promote. There are blogs that include “value-added” material from publishers; teasers from authors and illustrators; updates from editors; thumbs up/thumbs down reviews by kids, teachers, Moms, Dads, and doting aunts; short essays by special interest organizations and college professors, and much more.

With so much to choose from, like any library collection development activity, there was a need for selection criteria:

1) the blog must be current (regularly postings within a month’s period);
2) the blog should focus solely on the topic, rather than include reviews as part of the blogger’s general interests;
3) the content should provide more substance than a rant or rave (not solely limited to the under-20 set).

This isn’t meant to be a best-of, but in the tradition of the web, a randomly linked exploration of blogs by librarians, publishers, booksellers, moms, teachers, editors, young readers, and others who love to read and blog about children’s and YA lit.

Where to start? As with the ancients, the CYBILS: Children’s and Young Adult Bloggers Literary Awards — http://adadtalk.typepad.com/cybils/. The purpose of this site is to “reward children’s and YA fiction authors” and illustrators “whose books combine the highest literary merit and ‘kid appeal’” and to “foster a sense of community among bloggers who write about children’s and YA literature” and to highlight CYBILS’ best reviewers and their blogs. It would be tempting simply to list the best titles written and illustrated by African Americans in the categories of picture books, middle grade, and young adult novels.

Chicken Spaghetti: Books for children and the rest of us, too — http://www.chickenspaghetti.typepad.com/. Since 2005, Chicken Spaghetti, not the casserole, but the blog, has been a resources for teachers, librarians, parents, and the rest of us who love children’s literature.

Susan Thomsen has been a theatre reviewer, and has turned her attention to titles ranging from books for infants to manga to Russian books for kids and just about everything in between.

Cynsations — http://cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com/. Every self-respecting school or children’s librarian and teacher should be familiar with this child’s and YA author’s excellent resources (http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/), who has also been blogging on many aspects of literature for youth, including literacy and free speech advocacy, publishing news, and author outreach since 2004.

I.N.K.: Interesting Nonfiction for Kids — http://inkrethink.blogspot.com/ brings vivid writing to the attention of kids, teachers, parents, and librarians by showcasing the variety and creativity — and yes, storytelling — to be found in the best nonfiction for young readers. Featured team of writers includes Melissa Stewart, Kathleen Krull, and David Schwartz, among other notables.

American Indians in Children’s Literature — http://american-indianchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/ was launched in May 2006 by Debbie A. Reese, former school-teacher and assistant professor in the American Indian Studies program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This blog is a way to reach teachers, librarians, parents, and students to provide information and “critical perspectives of indigenous peoples in children’s books, the school curriculum, popular culture, and society-at-large.”


A Book and a Hug — http://www.abookandahug.com/ is more than a blog, but pretty much reads like one, so it fits — especially since it is searchable, divided into popular categories, and includes leveled books and a section dedicated to books recommended for boys. Barb Langridge is the force behind this site, and she is a popular figure on TV in Baltimore, particularly the NBC affiliate in Baltimore (WBAL), where she provides children’s book recommendations, and on her cable show, Books Alive!


The Brown Bookshelf: United in story — http://thebrownbookshelf.com/ promotes the diversity of titles by African American authors and illustrators for young readers with a variety of links and resources. Its noted showcase, 28 Days Later, is a month-long showcase of the best titles written and illustrated by African Americans in the categories of picture books, middle grade, and young adult novels.

Picture Book of the Day — http://www.picturebookoftheday.org/ is a meeting point for readers, librarians, teachers, parents, and the rest of us who love children’s literature.

The Website includes a children’s publishing shelf (feeds.asp) and has her students “tweet” micro-reviews of their children’s literature selections assignment on Twitter. — JM

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
The ceaseless tumbling of the billows grey,  
The white upspringing of the spurs of spray

In the last instalment, we encountered Basil Blackwell’s own “up-springs.” He and his father were frustrated poets, and both wrote articles, Basil profusely. Benjamin Henry wrote tourist guides for Oxford set between blue paper covers, serious in tone and style. All his working life Basil had wanted to write an account of the Blackwell story, and considerable correspondence exists in the Merton Blackwell Collection concerning his efforts. In the end he “ran out of time,” despite his 94 years. Almost certainly the need to concentrate on the family firm, they felt keenly the problems of struggling writers and extended them enormous generosity. Top of this list were those who would not otherwise have been noticed, let alone published; the story of Alf Williams, “the Hammerman Poet,” was the subject of the last issue. Another example of Blackwell beneficence concerns Edith Barfoot, who the soft-hearted Basil met in the 1950s. Over sixty, bed-ridden, and in constant pain with rheumatoid arthritis since her teens, she told Basil how she had triumphed over her pain under the spiritual guidance of the Cowley Fathers. Encouraged by one of their number, she produced a short paper entitled “The Discovery of...” (cont.)

**International Dateline — Earthly Paradise**

by Rita Ricketts (Blackwell’s Historian and Bodleian Visiting Scholar, Author Adventurers All, Tales of Blackwellians, of Books, Bookmen and Reading and Writing Folk’’) <Rita.Ricketts@bodleian.ox.ac.uk>