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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)
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Column Editor’s Note: *Ms. Roxanne Myers Spencer is Associate Professor and Coordinator for Western Kentucky University’s Educational Resources Center. From 2005-2008, 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 Catalunyan Private 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, book-sellers, 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://dadtalk.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 poke around the best-of bloggers since the award’s inception in 2006, but that would be cheating. **KidLitosphere Central** — <http://www.kidlitosphere.org/> is a meeting point for readers, librarians, teachers, parents, reviewers, publishers, authors, and other aficionados who blog about children’s and young adult literature, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. The site has evolved into a social network — and more — for enthusiasts and a home for panelists for the CYBILS Awards.

American Indians in Children’s Literature — <http://american-indiansinchildrensliterature.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.”

Anastasia Suen’s literacy, review, and writing blogs — <http://www.asuen.com/blog/>. **Ms. Suen** is the author of 115 books and teaches writing to students from kindergarten through college. She has several helpful blogs on writing for children, including **Read to Me** — <http://asuen4.wordpress.com/>, **Picture Book of the Day** — <http://6traits.wordpress.com/>, and **Book of the Week** — <http://asuenbooks.wordpress.com/>, each of which has something useful to offer teachers, parents, and aspiring writers for children. A bonus, among several, of her front page is her **Blog Central list of children’s book reviewers** — <http://www.asuen.com/blog/blog.central.kid.lit.shtml>.

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!**

Books4yourkids.com — <http://www.books4yourkids.com/> — Part book review blog, part philosophical musings on what makes a book good, this bookseller and mom has an extensive alphabetical list of book reviews listed alphabetically by title, author, reading level, and genre. A well-organized resource for parents, teachers, and librarians.

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.

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://cynthialeitchsmith.blogspot.com/>. Every self-respecting school or children’s librarian and teacher should be familiar with this children’s and YA author’s excellent resources (<http://www.cynthialeitchsmith.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 Steward**, **Kathleen Krull**, and **David Schwartz**, among other notables.

JacketFlap Bloglist — <http://www.jacketflap.com/megablog/my-feeds.asp>. **JacketFlap** bills itself as “a comprehensive resource for the children’s book industry.” The Website includes a children’s publishing blog reader (**Google Reader** or **Bloglines**) and lists 700 blogs related to children’s literature.

Jen Robinson’s Book Page — <http://jkr-books.typepad.com/blog/>. It speaks to the universality of the appeal of children’s litera-

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ture when someone with a PhD in industrial engineering, co-owner of a software company, and a doting aunt — not a mom, not a teacher, not a librarian, not an author or illustrator — blogs about kidlit. Highlights include *Cool Girls of Children's Literature*, *175 Cool Boys from Children's Literature*, *My 6 P's of Book Appreciation*, and *Ten Tips for Growing Bookworms*.

The Miss Rumphius Effect — <http://missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/>, with its origins in the 1982 **American Book Award** winner *Miss Rumphius* by **Barbara Cooney**, is the blog of teacher-educator **Patricia Stohr-Hunt**. Here, teachers, parents, and students will find reviews of poetry and nonfiction for young readers through middle grades. Included are thematic booklists, browse by content, and her Teaching Library link to LibraryThing (<http://www.librarything.com/catalog/pstohrkidlit>).

Mitali's Fire Escape: A safe place to chat about books between cultures — <http://www.mitaliblog.com/>. Author **Mitali Perkins** blogs about the power of diverse literature to influence our lives. Whether delving into bullying, storytelling customs, ethnic differences and similarities, the effect of various media in presenting different cultures, among other relevant topics, her insights are thoughtful, inclusive, and offer anyone seeking quality literature and its importance in cross-cultural understanding a safe place to explore.

Open Wide, Look Inside — <http://blog.richmond.edu/openwide-lookinside/>. A blog about teaching elementary math, science, and social studies, with heavy emphasis on the integration of children's literature across the curriculum. The blog description says it all. This blog should be a great resource for K-5 classroom teachers looking for ways to inspire reading as well as explain challenging concepts in math and science.

Poetry for Children — <http://poetryforchildren.blogspot.com/>. Since 2006, professor and author of *Poetry Aloud Here!* **Sylvia Vardell** has blogged about connecting children with poetry through activities, holidays, books, and outstanding modern poets writing for young readers.

Reading Rants — <http://www.readingrants.org/> — has been promoting out of the ordinary YA books on the Web for more than ten years. As a true pioneer of Web reviews and a veteran of the blogosphere, it is still going strong. **Jennifer** started the Website in 1998. It was transformed into an interactive blog in May 2007, where teens can respond to reviews and add their own. A fun feature of this site is its wonderfully inventive title lists, including such temptations as *Riot Grrrr!*, *Slacker Fiction*, *Stoned*, and *Boy Meets Book*.

Wands and Worlds — <http://blog1.wandsandworlds.com/>. Small publisher, organizer of the **CYBILS Awards**, **SFF** fan, **Sheila Ruth** reviews science fiction and fantasy for teens and tweens. Fans of dystopian, faerie, and mixed-genre sci-fi thrillers, etc., will find some good reads reviewed here.

Well-Read Child — <http://wellreadchild.blogspot.com/> — is compiled by instructional designer, mom, and book lover, **Jill Tullo**. Her

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blog offers book recommendations, learning activities, and reading tips. **Tullo's** mission is simple: "get kids to read" and to provide resources to help instill a love of reading.

YA Book Blog Directory — <http://yabookblogdirectory.blogspot.com/>. One-stop shop for teen and tween book fan blogs. Its sister site **YA Blogosphere** — <http://yablogosphere.blogspot.com/>, is a worldwide resource for authors, publishers, reviewers, and teen readers of young adult books.

YABC: Young Adult Books Central — <http://www.yabookscentral.com/>. Since 1998, **YABC** has been a Web presence for teen and tween literature. Book reviews, author interviews, newsletters, publicity, and other YA lit resources for and by teens and tweens. Lots of great resources for homework, too, but no, they won't write your book report for you.

YA YA YAs — <http://theyayayas.wordpress.com/>. "Three Young Adult Librarians blather about YA literature, YA librarianship...." and while they're at it, provide sharp, pithy reviews; book news; craft ideas; and links to tons of resources YA librarians can use for teen programming. 🐼

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>

The ceaseless tumbling of the billows grey, The white upspringing of the spurts of spray

In the last instalment, we encountered **Basil Blackwell's** own "upspringings." 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, ensuring its well-being and a livelihood for family and employees, kept the **Blackwell** men away from their writing.¹ Secure in 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

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