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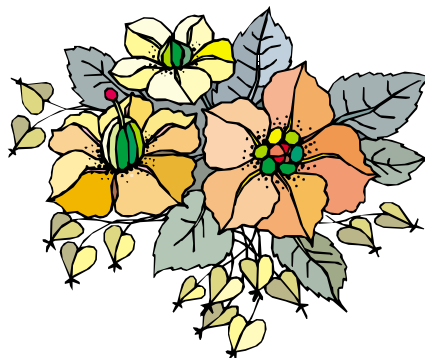


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all write news

SUMMER READING BOOK REVIEWS

For the past several years our summer issue has presented brief reviews of an eclectic assortment of books that A.L.R.I. staff (and others) recommend as good reading, for the summer or any other time. Most of the books can be found in the A.L.R.I. library.



Breath, Eyes, Memory, by Edwidge Danticat (Vintage, 1994)

Breath, Eyes, Memory is a novel that grips you slowly, tenderly and explosively as only the best pieces of literature can. Many times while reading it, I looked at the back jacket to stare at the picture of the author, for I wanted to figure out how someone so young can know

so much. From the picture, the pretty young woman stares back with only a hint of a smile in the closed lips and the older soul peers from eyes that are solemn from the knowing of life's joys and sorrows.

Because the story and the novelist are from Haiti, the book has been described as a Haitian-American novel, a "narrative... that bears witness to her people's suffering and courage." And that it is, for Haiti's history during the time of the Tonton Macoutes, its culture, and its language are the backdrop for the story of a Haitian girl who gets sent to New York to live with the mother who had left her behind to immigrate to the grand states. But there are other themes here that Danticat weaves into the Haitian world that she knows so well. The main one is that of exile and how, in this story, it interrelates with the reality of the lives of the Caco women, the Haitian incarnation of woman everywhere.

Indeed, the Caco women are all in various stages of exile, whether literal or emotional. We see how Tantie Atie, who takes care of Sophie when her mother leaves Haiti for the U.S., is in a slow retreat from reality that ends in

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A RADICAL IDEA: LET'S TREAT ADULT LEARNERS AS ADULTS!

by Thomas Sticht

This piece first appeared in June, 2001, on the NLA (National Literacy Advocates) listserv and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Adults are children who have grown up. When they have grown up they are no longer children. They have the right to vote, they work and pay taxes to provide for the defense of our nation, they build our highways, houses, and hospitals, they maintain our hotels, golf courses, country clubs, they raise our children and pay for our schools...even our Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) schools and programs. And each year over three million of these adults enroll in the AELS programs which their tax dollars pay for. Only then, when they commit to do a little learning, we stop treating them like adults and start treating them like children again.

For instance, even though our adult learners may be legally required to sit as jurors in judgment of other adults in support of our justice system, their own judgments are questioned when, in pursuit of "accountability" we ask

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Please see last page for
an Upcoming Activity
Announcement!

Please share this newsletter
with others at your program.
The deadline for submitting
material for the next issue is:
August 15.

A.L.R.I. Summer Hours:
During July and August
our building will be closing
at 5:00pm each day,
and our library will be open
only until 4:45 on Tuesdays.

A Radical Idea

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if they have learned anything valuable and they say “yes.” This is generally considered to reflect “response bias,” and so we insist that they prove that they have learned something by taking a standardized test.

To add injury to insult we then administer tests that have been developed using methods based on children in the K-12 system. For instance, the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and Adult Basic Learning Exam (ABLE) tests provide “grade level” scores, and they have been normed using adults who for the most part have come through the K-12 system so that years of education is reflected in the development of the test scales. That is, test scores go up as years of education go up. This influence of the K-12 system is seen in standardized tests such as the Tests of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS) which is based on the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) score scales for Prose, Document and Quantitative “literacy.”

But even though we use these tests that have been developed in the context of the K-12 system, we know that the AELS is not like the K-12 system. For instance, the K-12 system generally teaches students for 1080 hours a year for twelve years. The standardized tests for measuring progress in learning are based on the idea of “grade levels” because of this extended period of time for learning and, importantly, because there is a prescribed academic curriculum across our nation that is quite consistent from state to state and neighborhood to neighborhood in its general coverage of content and skills development.

But the AELS is entirely different from the K-12 system. It generally provides only 50 to 100 or so hours of instruction in a wide variety of content areas that are not academic subjects in the K-12 system, such as specific health care information, driver’s license applications, work-related knowledge, parenting, spousal abuse, marriage and divorce, crime and the criminal justice system, consumerism and finance, and other adult life-oriented content. Skills development, such as reading and writing fluency, may not develop much because of the limited time in programs that is typical of adult learners.

But with all these (and other) differences in the K-12 and AELS education systems, we still apply the ideas of learning and accountability for children in the K-12 system to the adults in the AELS, even when we use tests that provide scale scores instead of grade levels. It doesn’t matter what we call them, they are all influenced by the K-12 system, as witnessed by the high correlations between years of education and performance on the tests. If we are serious about measuring learning in the AELS, we might want to spend some time learning about how learning in the AELS is different from learning and development in the K-12 system.

Our treatment of the AELS as a K-12 system is reflected in the fact that the AELS is sometimes referred to as a “second

chance” system, as though adults are getting a second shot at learning what they did not learn the first time. This is probably heavily influenced by the fact that so many of our AELS providers came out of the tradition of high school “evening schools” for youth who were working in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They learned at night what the day school kids learned during the day. It is also influenced by our fixation upon the Tests of General Education Development (GED) as alternative high school credentials. Though the External Degree program has been around for years as a model for how we could certify adults as possessing competent literacy, numeracy and thinking skills using adult-oriented content and problems, we still insist upon providing a certificate based not only on the skills that K-12 develops but also the academic subject areas of literature, science, social studies and so forth, and not on the important content that adults learn in the AELS.

It is also not generally acknowledged that the K-12 system deals with the full range of learners among children, while the AELS deals with mostly “special needs” adults, many of whom suffer from negative beliefs about their own learning ability. This suggests that the most frequent accomplishment of the AELS, that is, helping adults believe in their ability to learn and stimulating their self-confidence for further learning, should be recognized as a major outcome of the AELS programs, not as some “soft” throw-away accomplishment. Indeed, one pays dearly for such outcomes in psychotherapy, much more than the \$320 per enrollee that the AELS gets. This type of “psychological self-sufficiency” is critical to getting millions of adults on their way to economic self-sufficiency.

We also know that the biological and cognitive development of children in the K-12 system follows a different course from that of adults from post-adolescence to middle-age to senescence. Yet we approach adult learners the same way as we do children. We give them the same kinds of standardized tests, we expect them to engage in “second chance” learning, to prove that they have learned something instead of taking their word for it, to hold their teachers and administrators accountable for learning instead of the adults themselves, just as though the adults are children and do not share responsibility for their learning.

It seems to me that now that we have a viable, though greatly under-funded, AELS in place, and we have a lot of knowledge about adult learning and development across life, we ought to start thinking about the ways we might go about addressing learning and accountability in a system that provides about 50 to 100 hours of instruction on average, that addresses a wide diversity of content knowledge, that does not increase “fluency” very much in the limited time of instruction, and that is run for adults whose taxes and political actions pay for and keep the AELS in operation and whose opinions about the value of the AELS ought to be respected. In short, I think it’s about time we start understanding the AELS as an adult education system adapted to adult lives, and start regarding adult learners as adults.

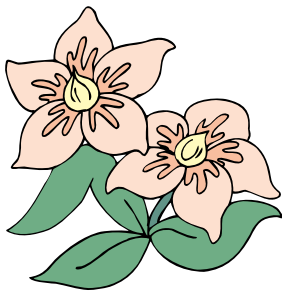
Summer Reading

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alcoholism. Granmamon, the matriarch of the family has also retreated into that space of aloofness that elderly women take when they realize their best dreams won't be realized and there is nothing they can do about it. Central to the story is the migration of Sophie's mother, not just for economic reasons but also to escape terrible memories. But trauma cannot be denied, for beating it back like an ugly weed only makes it grow into a tangled mess. It continues to torture Sophie's mother, as the child finds out soon enough when she goes to live with the parent she hardly knew. It was a shock to go from the verdant, cozy world of Tantie Atie in Haiti to the asphalt and treelessness of Brooklyn, New York.

With the change in setting, the novel loses some of the colorfulness of the images that make the narrative powerful and magical. There is not enough about how little Sophie copes with the shocks and thrills of being in a new place. Danticat accelerates the narrative so that we find Sophie at eighteen falling in love and eloping with the musician next door. She returns to Haiti in search of answers to her mother's traumatic past and how in turn it has traumatized Sophie almost to the point of breakdown. At that point in the novel, the writing becomes lush again, almost lyrical, as at the beginning. It suggest that Danticat, like many writers of the different diasporas of the world, writes about her place of origin through the lenses of nostalgia and longing, as if writing about paradise lost.

The strength and charm of this novel lies in the vivid descriptions of Haiti, its people and its culture, which the author writes about honestly and lovingly. Edwidge Danticat is a writer to watch out for in the future. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is an extraordinary first novel and I can't wait to read her next one, *The Farming of Bones*, also available at the A.L.R.I. library.
—*María E. González*



The Best for our Children: Critical Perspectives on Literacy for Latino students, edited by Maria de la Luz Reye and John J. Halcon (Teachers College Press, 2001)

Best for our Children is a collection of fourteen empowering essays, written by mostly female Mexican American scholars and teachers, about the education of Latinos in the adverse climate of California's recent anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant legislation. Much has been written in education research about the value of Freire's concept of *concientizaçã* and Vygotsky's "area of proximal development." As an educator I have always found the concepts useful in framing my teaching but have rarely read so much about their importance in driving the education of Latino students.

The essays contain examples of successful learners as well as educational approaches, from the level of pre-school children's education to the level of Family Literacy and teacher training. While they are guided by the theoretical stands of research (the "why"), most importantly each one of the essays offers an example of the "how" and the "what." It should be possible, after examining the circumstances particular to our own ABE and ESOL classrooms, to design approaches comparable to those described in the book. Finally, the book is an inspiration to all Latinos, since the authors, many of whom are university professors, represent success stories themselves. This book is full of "garra" and is a must read for any teacher.
—*Yvonne LaLyre*



Savage Inequalities, by Jonathan Kozol (Crown, 1991)

In *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol opens with a portrait of East St. Louis and its schools. The description of the raw sewage, the kids with no health care, the brazenness of surrounding industry and suburban districts in isolating the families in this African-American community made me sick to my stomach. New news? Not really, especially since the book has been out for ten years. But if you are like me, and have a piecemeal understanding of the way defining issues in education fit together to create the school landscape that overwhelms children, parents, schoolteachers and principals
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today, this book lays it all out. Where are we with desegregation, litigation, property taxes, and magnet schools? Why does Boston seem like a white city, particularly in staff meetings, yet dismissal time across the street from a school tells a completely different story? Several court cases have challenged the unequal funding structures that support the “savage inequalities.” Is there evidence of gains as a result of litigation? Why do my relatives in the suburbs pay lower taxes and have better schools? Kozol contrasts schools numerically and graphically. He describes facilities and staffing in pairs of schools—Camden and Cherry Hill, NJ, P.S. 261 and 24 in New York, East St. Louis and Winnetka, IL—with regard to things like bathrooms and science labs, ratios of counselors to kids, and class size.

Quotes from interviews round out the pictures. A fourteen year old girl with short black curly hair says, “We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King, the school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is black. It’s like a terrible joke on history.” (p. 34-35) Another girl says, “You see a lot about the crimes committed here in East St. Louis when you turn on the TV. Do they show the crimes committed by the government that puts black people here? Why are all the dirty businesses like chemicals and waste disposal here? This is a big country. Couldn’t they find another place to put their poison?” (p. 35)

Throughout the book, I kept consoling myself. At least things aren’t so bad in Boston. I live around the corner from an inner-city school. The façade is a little fortress-like, but there is a lawn and it sports nut trees and a grape arbor, thanks to EarthWorks. Then again, I have no idea what the science equipment is like. Do the kids have their own books in each subject? I’m 100% certain that on a daily basis students don’t have to contend with raw sewage. Nevertheless, I must remind myself of the flood a couple years ago which had Roslindale residents awash in sewage. I remember having to cancel a workshop when the Archdale Community Center closed. Has the city fixed the problem? And what about the huge numbers of children whose rest and respiratory systems are under siege from Logan Airport and diesel buses? Does a state that really cares about its children not only allow but support the sixth largest polluter in the commonwealth to expand its operations near a densely populated area?

It seems as though most of the new and recent funding for schools is channeled into testing. Against the backdrop of this book, high stakes testing is such a ludicrous plan. Kozol’s research shows that we systematically saddle poor kids and especially children of color with educational disadvantages—large class sizes, no books, reduced access to clean air, water, health care, dental care—and then, when the children don’t test as well as kids who have all the advantages, the rhetoric blames their home environments and the proposal is to

impose consequences (read punish) the schools where kids aren’t performing. I loved how Kozol deconstructs the rhetoric that surrounds these debates. Frankly, I’ve been confused by the studies which show that class size isn’t a determining factor in learning. As Kozol explains it, certain sources, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, say, “The usual reduction in class size from 30 to 24, for instance, isn’t enough to make a difference.” (p. 135) So Kozol reasons, then deeper cuts, to the class size of 17, as in Winnetka, might be in order. But the *Journal* notes that “as a universal principle, the idea that smaller classes automatically mean more learning doesn’t hold water.” (p. 135) And so, one by one, suggested changes are ruled out because they alone won’t guarantee major change and the idea of more than one expensive change is anathema to taxpayers. Now I feel armed when I hear policymakers and suburban parents finish explaining how money and the advantages it brings, like low student-teacher ratios, don’t really make any difference.

What does any of this have to do with adult basic education? You would think our programs would look like heaven, especially to young adults leaving classes of 30, schools with hundreds of kids where there are two working toilets. In adult basic education, they find student-teacher ratios of 15 or 12 to one, often a concerned counselor. Why don’t prospective students have an epiphany when they walk into a local GED program? An example from a third grade teacher stuck with me: “I passed out dictionaries once... One of my students started ripping out the pages when he found a word. I said, ‘What are you doing? You leave the pages there for the next person.’ And he told me, ‘That’s their problem. This is my word.’” (p. 64-65) Once the scarcity is ingrained, it’s difficult to overcome. If I was in the mood to be stingy about giving each learner a book, Kozol’s prose has disabused me of that notion.

In some sense, Kozol left me feeling better about adult basic education. I sometimes see myself working in a field that is a band-aid on a festering wound. No. We are really an alternative system. I feel re-committed to the idea that districts’ per-student dollars ought to follow the learners into our programs. We are a viable alternative, not just a band-aid.

—Martha Merson



From Bomba to Hip-Hop, Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity, by Juan Flores (Columbia University Press, 2000)

What does cultural studies mean in a Puerto Rican context? Juan Flores, a sociologist at the City University of New York, provides his version in his new book of essays *From Bomba to Hip-Hop, Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. One of Flores’ main approaches is to use expressions of popular culture and literature as a vehicle for considering contempo-

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rary issues in Puerto Rican culture, the culture of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, and the connection between Puerto Rican culture and the larger entity referred to as Latino culture. The essays are built around his proposition that the pan-ethnic concept of a Latino community can be useful but only in so much as it takes into account the component cultures of the different Latin American groups and their counterparts in the diaspora. Flores' home territory is the Puerto Rican community in New York City. He situates the experience of U.S. Puerto Ricans alongside that of other Latinos, most notably Chicanos, and also non-Latinos as well, particularly African Americans. Flores argues that as an internally colonized group, Puerto Ricans share much with other groups who have shared this internally colonized status.

Flores has an interest in looking at the flow of cultural currents between a number of groups. He explores the connection between Puerto Rican folk music forms—for instance, the bomba—and more recent music trends like hip hop. He notes that the trend of using music as a means of publicizing important issues in the community (its newspaper-like function) has been most closely replicated in rap music. Indeed, some of the most accessible and enjoyable parts of this book are the chapters that explore the contemporary music scene. In his preface to the collection, Flores recounts a hip hop conference at Hunter College that took place in 1998, from which he borrows the title for his book. He is clearly moved by the vitality of a popular gathering of performers and fans of hip hop music as they recall their immediate history of production in New York and Puerto Rico and their deeper roots in other Puerto Rican music traditions.

Flores explores the theme of identity as it is represented in literature in at least two of his chapters: "Life Off the Hyphen," and "The Lite Colonial, Diversions of Puerto Rican Discourse." For Flores, "Life Off the Hyphen" is his own code for referring to Puerto Ricans in the U.S. who have declined a hyphenated identity (i.e., Puerto Rican-American). The reference in the code is to a book by Cuban critic and fiction writer Gustavo Perez Firmat's *Life On the Hyphen*, a book in which the author explores the experience of the "one and a half generation" of Cuban-Americans. Flores' discussions of literature and writers who write about literature includes writers of Cuban, Mexican and Puerto Rican descent, yet, in terms of fiction writers, Flores' central interest is the Puerto Rican author Abraham Rodriguez.

For most instructors, teaching about the experience of Puerto Ricans means integrating Puerto Ricans into a discussion of some larger topic, like different cultures in the United States. Teaching the Puerto Rican experience can be viewed as a part of a larger project of teaching the Latino experience by using a specific example. Is *From Bomba to Hip Hop* an appropriate text for a teacher or educator who will

include a brief focus on Puerto Rican culture? Perhaps the whole book would be difficult to use, simply because the nature of the debates this author is responding to are somewhat complicated. However, its useful organization as a set of stand-alone essays means that some of the essays can be used as background reading. The book represents an important contribution to the current dialogue regarding Puerto Rican studies and could serve as background reading for the lively debate regarding Latinos and Latino studies today

—Vicky Núñez



Guns, Germs, and Steel, by Jared Diamond (Norton, 1997)

World history used to portray the colonization and domination of much of the world by Europeans and others from the territory of Eurasia as essentially inevitable and morally right. In more recent times, although the morality of this conquest has often been called into question, the sense of inevitability has largely remained. Eurasians developed superior technology, especially weapons, and carried with them a host of diseases that proved lethal to other populations—the "guns, germs, and steel" of this book's title—and were thus able to conquer the world. If the question of why it worked out this way was ever asked at all, it was usually answered in terms of what was essentially a notion of global manifest destiny that explicitly or implicitly ascribed European or Eurasian success to some form of biological (racial) and/or cultural superiority.

Jared Diamond, an eminent biologist and anthropologist, has written a tremendously important book (winner of the Pulitzer Prize) that challenges and successfully refutes these notions of inherent racial and cultural superiority. *Guns, Germs, and Steel* instead attributes the European/Eurasian success story to the luck of the geographical and biological draw. Looking back into prehistory, Diamond shows that, when compared with the rest of the world, the Eurasian continent was uniquely favored in terms of both the number of native wild plant species that were suitable to large scale cultivation for food purposes and the number of native wild animal species that were suitable for domestication for food, transportation, and other uses. Large scale food production therefore developed first and most successfully on the Eurasian continent. And it was able to spread more easily throughout that area than was possible in the rest of the world, due to the generally east/west orientation of that land mass, which produced more similar climate conditions in contiguous areas, hence facilitating the spread of domesticated plant and animal species. With the development of large-scale food production came increased populations, higher population densities, and the capacity for

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accelerated technological development, including transportation and weaponry, and cultural development, including literacy and centralized government. And, since most of the infectious diseases that proved fatal to other populations were derived from diseases that arose in domestic animal flocks, Eurasians had over time developed general immunity to these diseases, while those without such domestic animals had no opportunity to acquire these immunities, resulting in the incredible epidemics that raced through Native American and other societies after contact with Europeans.

So, Diamond says, it's essentially because certain plants and animals just happened to live in Eurasia and not elsewhere and because Eurasia geographically favored the diffusion, once domesticated, of these plants and animals, that the chain of events began which ultimately resulted in, for example, Francisco Pizarro and the Spanish conquering the Inca Empire, rather than the other way around. No biological racial superiority, no inherent cultural superiority, just the contingent facts of planetary geography and biological evolution that influenced so strongly the possibility of certain populations being able to develop in certain directions.

I've only been able to present Diamond's arguments here in their most abbreviated, stripped-down form; the book itself is a much more elegant presentation that provides an enormous quantity of specific biological data and other compelling evidence to back up his overall thesis. *Guns, Germs, and Steel* is a fascinating book, written in non-technical, generally accessible language, that deserves the widest possible audience.

—Steve Reuys



Easy Access Computer Books

Summer is a quiet time with fewer workshops scheduled here. The A.L.R.I. lab is open and we invite you to come in and spend time with our computers. If you haven't had time to learn how to search the web,

I will be glad to sit beside you and help you get started. The lab is air-conditioned because the computers need to be comfortable. You can share the chilliness while surfing the web, experimenting with computers, peripherals, software, and programs, or even reading books—on computers, writing, assessment, math, volunteer management, whatever.

A.L.R.I. staff made an expedition to the NE Mobile warehouse for the final order of new books for this year. We reserved a portion of the money for new books on technology. Akira picked up some hefty reference materials on computers and networks, while I went looking for the skinny books with charts and color illustrations. Some of our new books include:

Virtual Power: Technology Education and Community (Pacific Southwest Regional Technology in Education Consortium, 1998) Think about the teaching first and then see how the technology can strengthen the good things that you are already doing. A special emphasis on bilingual classes, equity issues, global learning networks. This is also available on-line at <<http://psrtec.clmer.csulb.edu/virtualp/virtual.htm>>.

Technology for Diverse Learners, edited by Karen Gutloff (National Education Association, 1997) and *Teaching with Technology*, by Sabrina Holcomb (NEA, 1999) The books in the NEA "Teacher-to-Teacher" series are stories from K-12 classroom teachers. Descriptions of what works (and does not work) with reproducible checklists and tables that they think other teachers will find useful. Inclusion of high school at-risk and ESOL classes connects the stories to adult education needs. Reality based, practical, short.

Creating Presentations, by Terry Burrows; *Creating Worksheets*, by Robert Dinwiddie; *Em@il*, by Annalisa Milner; and *Designing Documents*, by John Watson (all Dorling Kindersley, 2000) I discovered the Dorling Kindersley series "Essential Computers" at my local public library and I brought *Em@il* in to work to help me set up my address book. Several of the titles in this series are now in the A.L.R.I. Library. These are pocket-sized books less than 75 pages long. You can open them up and put them on your lap and begin to teach yourself Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, Outlook Express email and document design with Microsoft Word. Eventually you may need to move on to the hefty reference books and manuals. But these little books are clear and colorful confidence boosters that make a starting point.

—Sandra Darling



Half a Heart, by Rosellen Brown (Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2000)

Half a Heart is a fascinating novel that deals with issues of identity—racial identity primarily, but also class, gender, and personal identity as well. It is the story of Miriam

Vener, a White middle-aged woman living in Houston with three children and a hefty bank account as a result of her marriage, who suddenly decides to try to locate her daughter Veronica, the product of a relationship she had, while teaching at a college in Mississippi, with an African-American colleague named Eljay Reece. She hasn't seen this daughter for eighteen years, since she was essentially forced by Eljay to relinquish Veronica into his custody because, as a mixed-race baby, she will be seen by our society as Black. Can Miriam at this stage establish any sort of relationship, maternal or otherwise, with her long-lost daughter? Can this be done through the thick screens of race and class, as well as an eighteen-year separation? Can it be done in the context

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of Miriam's current and essentially all-White life?

But the book is also Veronica's story, and it is increasingly told from her perspective as the novel progresses. Veronica (now known as Ronnee) was raised for the most part by her father in New York City and is, it turns out, also trying to locate her mother, but for a different reason. She's been accepted at Stanford but doesn't have the money to attend and, believing (correctly) that her mother is quite well off, is hoping to get her to finance her college education. How will she relate to this mother that she essentially never knew? How will she fit into her mother's new life? Can she play the role of daughter well enough to be able eventually to pop the question about money?

Things, of course, do not turn out quite the way either Miriam or Ronnee expects, and everything that happens has nuances of race and class that each must grapple with. Both characters are portrayed sympathetically, and the ambiguities and difficulties of the situation for both are fully explored. Brown sees no easy answers to their situation and to the questions mentioned above, and indeed the novel ends in mid-conversation, with no hint of resolution. Will some form of permanent mother/daughter relationship emerge from the extremely fragile connections between them? If so, how will Miriam be able to integrate this relationship into her other family? Will Ronnee get financial support for college from Miriam, whether out of guilt or otherwise? The reader is free to speculate.

—*Steve Reuys*



Journey of the Pink Dolphins: An Amazon Quest, by Sy Montgomery (Simon & Schuster, 2000)

It's remarkable what hardship people will endure to satisfy their passions. In this mix of natural science,

folklore and adventure, Sy Montgomery, naturalist and former *Boston Globe* columnist, recounts her travels in Brazil and Peru in search of the elusive freshwater pink dolphins of the Amazon. Her daily existence consisted of avoiding piranhas, spines, spiders and poisonous ants, not to mention contending with large rats trying to share her sleeping quarters. Taking this all in stride, the author offers a detailed description of the peoples and animal life amid the banks of the Amazon River. This is a place where little girls "play with crocodiles as if they were Barbie dolls," and children travel in waterbuses to schools built on stilts.

Her writing is a combination of science, folklore and poetry. Here's an excerpt from the book:

But if you stop and wait, the Encantados will come. At first you may feel a sizzle of bubbles

rising beneath the craft, an effusion of pearls cast up below like a net of enchantment. If the night is moonless, you will only know their breath. But if the moon is full, you may see a form rising from the water, gathering into the shape of a dolphin. Inches from your canoe, a face may break the surface—a face at once otherworldly and eerily familiar. The forehead is eerily defined, like a person's. The long beak sticks out like a nose. The skin is delicate, like ours. Sometimes it is grayish, or white—and sometimes dazzling, impossibly pink.

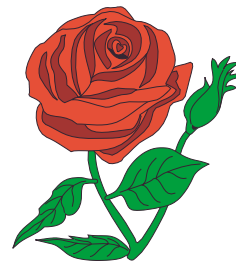
The creature turns its neck and looks at you, and opening the top of its head, gasps, "Chaaahhhhh!"

In Brazil, they call this dolphin "boto." They say the boto can turn into a person, that it shows up at festas to seduce men and women. They say you must be careful, or it will take you away forever to the Encante, the enchanted city beneath the water.

The legends of the "boto" are undeniably rich in imagination and drama, and the scientific facts on these ancient creatures and the local human cultures are fascinating.

Sy Montgomery got the idea for this book in Bangladesh, while she happened to be studying man-eating tigers. For weeks she hadn't seen any tigers, which is probably a good thing, in my opinion. While looking out into the river she did, however, spot three pale pink fins, and though they were just seen for an instant she was haunted by their image. Many years later, at a marine mammal conference she met a man who was familiar with these rare fresh water dolphins. He told her why she felt this way when seeing these creatures. He said in a very matter of fact way that that they capture souls. The world's most primitive whales seem to stir a lot of controversy in the communities around the Amazon with regard to what is deemed fact or fiction about these strange pink mammals.

Whether or not you believe in their magical powers, you will find this a good summer book to read while visiting your favorite watering hole. This book is available at Boston, Somerville and Brookline Public Libraries. —*Katy Hartnett*



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Advance Notice of an Upcoming Staff Development Activity

Introduction to the Workplace Essential Skills Multi-Media Instructional Program

The Massachusetts Department of Education has purchased a statewide license for a new multi-media (video/web/print) essential skills learning program that all DOE-funded adult basic education programs will be able to take advantage of. Workplace Essential Skills is a new instructional package that teaches basic skills in reading, writing, communication, and math in a workplace context. It can be used in GED preparation and other adult education classes, on-the-job training, and distance education programs. The SABES regional centers will be sponsoring informational sessions where you can learn about this program and how you can use it effectively with your students. These sessions will be in late summer or early fall. The session for the Boston region will probably take place in early-to-mid September at the DOE in Malden. Details on this session will be announced later this summer, probably via a special mailing and/or e-mail to DOE-funded program coordinators, so watch for this mailing if you're interested in this session.

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