

Elementary Book Reviews

Summer 2013

Each Kindness

by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E.B. Lewis.
Nancy Paulson Books (2012).

Maya, is a new girl in school. The teacher has Maya sit next to Chloe. Maya smiles at Chloe, but Chloe turns away from her. While Maya repeatedly tries to make friends by inviting classmates to play with her, starting conversations and smiling at them, none reciprocate.

One day, when Maya does not come to school; the morning lesson is on kindness. The teacher, Ms. Albert, illustrates how small acts of kindness can make a difference by dropping a small stone in a bowl of water and noting the large ripples. Ms. Albert asks each child to drop a stone in the bowl and state a kindness they have shown. When it is Chloe's turn, she can't think of anything – even when Ms. Albert tells her “Even small things count.” What Chloe does think about is how she had not shown kindness to Maya; she resolves to be kind to Maya once she returns.

After several days of absences, Ms. Albert tells the class Maya's family had to move. As Chloe walks home, she stops at a pond and throws small stones; watching the ripples and thinking of the lost chances of showing kindness to Maya.

This is a fantastic story illustrating kindness and compassion. I think it would be wonderful to read at the beginning of the year to make students more understanding and accepting of “the new kids” in school.

Each Kindness has received many honors from starred reviews in *Booklist*, *Publisher's Weekly* and *School Library Journal* to honors such as Charlotte Zolotow Award Winner; 2013 Coretta Scott King Book Award Author Honors – 2013; Jane Addams Book Award 2013 – Winners; and Notable Books for a Global Society 2013.

Highly recommended for K – 4th grades.
Reading Level: 2.8
Lexile: 640

The Cheshire Cheese Cat: A Dickens of a Tale

by Carmen Agra Deedy and Randall Wright;
drawings by Barry Moser. Peachtree Publishers:
Atlanta, Georgia. (2011).

I chose this book to review because it is on the 2013-2014 Charlie May Simon Reading List. In addition, not only have I enjoyed Carmen Agra Deedy's picture books, *The Library Dragon* and *14Cows for America*, but I have listened to her storytelling at an Arkansas Reading Association Conference and was able to have her autograph *The Library Dragon* for me (she signed it to Michele Carroll, Library Goddess). So, I am making a disclaimer that I am somewhat prejudiced toward this book ☺ But, I stayed up until 11:00 on a Saturday night because I had to find out what happened to the characters at the end of the story.

The setting is at a tavern, The Cheshire Cheese, in Victorian England. Not only does the tavern have the best cheese in England, but it also has an abundance of mice of which the landowner wants to be rid. Enter Skilley, a tom cat described in the first paragraph as “He was the best of Toms. He was the worst of Toms.” – A clue to one of the famous patrons of the tavern – Charles Dickens.

Skilley gains the spot as mouse catcher – but he doesn't like to eat mice; he loves cheese. Skilley works out a proposition with Pip (a spokesman for the mice) to “catch” mice only to let them go out of sight of humans with the condition the mice keep him supplied with cheese. All things are going well (except for Mr. Dickens writer's block – he's writing the story he thinks will be his finest, *Great Expectations*, but can't think of an opening line) until Pinch, a mean alley cat, is recruited by the barmaid to “assist” Skilley in catching mice. Meanwhile a “hidden creature” is watching Skilley with suspicion while trying to plot his release from the tavern's garret so he can save England from an impending invasion from France.

A tale of kindness, friendship and loyalty with rich vocabulary and vivid imagery, *The Cheshire Cheese Cat: A Dickens of a Tale* will keep readers

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engrossed. A website, <http://www.cheshirecheesecat.com/> has been created to explore Victorian England and learn more about Charles Dickens and the creators. There is also a teacher's resource guide available for printing.

Not only is *The Cheshire Cheese Cat: A Dickens of a Tale* on the Charlie May Diamond reading list, it is also on several other state's intermediate reading list for the upcoming school year. It has received star book reviews from *Publishers Weekly*, *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews*; and has also been named ALA Notable Children's Books 2012 and Parents' Choice Gold Award 2011.

Highly recommended.

Interest Level: 3-6

Reading Level: 5.1

Lexile 740