

Variety makes Christmas books ideal presents

By Penelope M. Smith

There is no frigate like a book that takes us lands away... Emily Dickinson

Christmas has always been a time for giving beautiful books. In spite of the seeming trend away from the written word toward the television set, children's books are more beautiful, informative and less condescending than ever before. The volume and diversity of children's books available for gift giving is staggering.

With the help of Leslie Roper, the children's book buyer for the Nebraska Bookstore and Ginger Mitchell, we've selected some of the outstanding books available worthy for consideration as gifts for everyone.

christmas art

People tend to shy away from poetry and label it too abstract or esoteric. Two of the volumes available for children do much to dispel this myth.

One inexpensive but lovely book is the paperbound *I'm Nobody! Who are you?* (Stemmer House, \$5.95), a collection of poems by Emily Dickinson for young people. It's illustrated by Rex Schneider. There is a simple introduction explaining Emily Dickinson's life and her poetry, but the joy of the book is in the soft pastel illustrations. (They cover the entire page with pictures of Miss Emily in her New England countryside. The illustrations are lovingly explanatory of what metaphors there are in the work; therefore, they remove any possible intimidation.

Where the Sidewalk Ends (Harper and Row, \$9.95), written and illustrated by Shel Silverstein, is a book of delightful non-sensical poems with a purpose.

"Jimmy Jet and his TV set" is about a little boy who watched television for so long that he "grew pale and lean" and eventually turned into a television set.

"It's Dark in Here" is illustrated with a hilarious picture and an arm scribbling poems out of the mouth of a lion. "Please excuse the handwriting," the poet entreats, "which may not be clean. But this afternoon by the lion's cage, I'm afraid I got too near."

Paperbacks inexpensive

Paperbound classics at inexpensive prices abound.

Winnie the Pooh, *The Wizard of Oz* series and the *Secret Garden* are available, just to name a few.

There are many surprises in store for those of us who think certain books became extinct after kindergarten. One such series with classic longevity is Ludwig Bemelmam's irrepressible *Madeleine*, which has been around since 1939.

The illustrations are as quick and joyously splashy as ever, with scenes of France and Paris and such lovely memories as twelve little umbrellas walking in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in the streaking rain. An added attraction is that they now come with reinforced bindings and won't fall apart after numerous readings.

Among new editions of classics, Michael Hague's illustrations for the *Wind in the Willows* (Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, \$16.95), are superb. With such competition as Arthur Rackham and Ernest Shepard, it is hard to believe that another illustrator would attempt to follow them. But Hague has, and successfully so, that nowhere has Mr. Toad or his friends Rat Mole and Badger been seen with such definite personality. The illustrations are watercolor and ink, but with very little looseness and loving attention to detail that is worthy of Hagues predecessors.

For the younger child or the creative adult, there are beautiful books on the market without words—the books that allow one to make up one's own stories. Books by English authors John S. Goodall about holidays and seasons in bygone days in England are delightful. One is an *Edwardian Summer* (Atheneum, \$6.95), that starts with pictures of a small English town and grazing sheep. It leads one leisurely through cricket matches on the lawn and a beautiful Edwardian wedding.

Outstanding among books without words is Tatjana Hauptman's *A Day in the Life of Petronella Pig* (Sunflower Book, \$12.95), an utterly charming big book that was printed by Swiss printers. It is well worth the cost. The book follows Petronella Pig, a delightfully-porcine matron, through her house and through her day. It ends, finally, by leading the reader out through her bedroom window and into the moonlit garden beyond.

Books for all races

Pop-up books delight children of all ages. Outstanding

among them is *Haunted House* (Sutton, \$8.95), which shows both ingenuity and originality of design by its illustrator and paper engineer. There are color wheels so the fire and pictures in a clock change colors, and slides so the curtains of a bed move and a ghost appears. The monsters are benevolently weird and will cause more giggles than screams.

One very positive advancement in the book industry is that it now provides beautiful books for children of all ethnic backgrounds. Both classics like Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit*, available in a variety of languages, and new and beautiful books like Paul Goble's native American tale *The Gift of the Sacred Dog* (Bradbury Press, \$8.95), that tells the legend of how the horse was given to the plains tribes. The 1979 runner-up for the Caldecott award, *Ben's Trumpet*, tells of a young boy growing up in the 1920s who plays an imaginary trumpet until a real jazz trumpeter offers to teach him to play, are all for sale. *Ben's Trumpet* is an especially-beautiful book done in rhythmic black, white and silver. It is what has been described as an "art deco style evocative of the 1920s and echoing the jazz itself."

Numerous educational books are in print to help children handle problems in life. One of the most interesting for any adult or child is *Sesame Street Sign Language Fun* (Random House, \$5.95), prepared by Linda Bove, an associate of the National Theater of the Deaf. While the Sesame Street characters illustrate certain scenes like "Summer," Bove is photographed doing signs which apply to the season like "swim," "bathing suit" and "hot."

The thing to remember is whether your child, brother or sister likes *Winnie the Pooh* or *Star Wars* pop-up books. There are thousands of books this Christmas, and half the joy is in browsing.

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 NEXT TO PICKLE BILL'S ON N.48TH

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 (PG)

5:30-7:30-9:30
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