

THE MAGIC MIRROR

Number 11
(February 2007)

"It is the function of some people to be a lamp and some to be a mirror. I have been very pleased to function as a mirror of others' work." — Arne Nixon

Secret Garden Party in April

The Arne Nixon Center Advocates (ANCA) invites everyone to its fifth annual Secret Garden Party on Sunday, April 15, from 3–5 p.m. Held in a beautiful Tuscan garden nestled in the Sierra foothills, the party's exact location will be revealed to underwriters and ticket holders upon registration. This year's theme is the art of the late Leo Politi. The Fresno-born, Caldecott-winning author/artist was a close friend of Arne Nixon's. The Party will raise funds to create a Leo Politi garden outside the new Library.

Underwriters are needed; they will receive tickets to the party and acknowledgements in promotional materials. The \$1,000 Sponsor fee includes eight tickets; Patrons, for a \$500 fee, get six tickets; Contributors, for \$250, receive four tickets. Individual tickets are also available for \$50. The garden party is ANCA's major annual fundraising event: all profits benefit the Nixon Center.

For information call (559) 278-5790 or send E-mail to kelliew@csufresno.edu.

Lemony Snicket here in March

The University Lecture Series will sponsor "An Evening with Daniel Handler" (also known as Lemony Snicket), the bestselling children's author in the United States, on Tuesday, March 27, at 7:30 p.m. at the Satellite Student Union. Lemony Snicket's 12-part series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, has sold more than 27 million books worldwide. The books feature the tragic and comic adventures of Violet, Klaus, and Sunny (the Baudelaire orphans) as they escape from their wicked guardian, Count Olaf, and a variety of other villains. The first three books were made into a hit 2004

(See Lemony, page 7)

Four famous authors to speak

Four critically acclaimed authors—Avi, Sharon Creech, Walter Dean Myers, and Sarah Weeks—have joined together to form A.R.T.: Authors Readers Theatre. The A.R.T. authors will perform selections from their books in Fresno on Friday, March 2, at 6:30 p.m. at Sunnyside High School Theatre, 1019 South Peach. Sunnyside is located at the southeast corner of Peach and Kings Canyon. The entrance to the parking lot is from a stoplight on Peach.

The presentation is of particular interest to adults and students in grades 4 through 12. This event is co-sponsored by the School of Education at Fresno Pacific University, the Arne Nixon Center, Fresno Pacific University, the Fresno County Public Library, Sunnyside High School, and Petunia's Place bookstore. Admission is free but limited to 500 attendees: first come, first served. Books will be available for sale and autographing at the event. The presentation, which will begin at 6:30 p.m., will last about 90 minutes, with time for questions at the end.

Avi has published 59 books and is the winner of the Newbery Medal for *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*; two Newbery Honors, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and *Nothing but the Truth*; plus two Horn Book awards and the O'Dell and Christopher awards. His Web site



(See A.R.T., page 2)

Avi

Please plan to join us!

March 2: Authors Readers Theatre

March 27: Lemony Snicket

April 15: Secret Garden Party

October 6: SCBWI Regional Workshop



A.R.T., from front page -

Sharon Creech, who has donated many foreign language editions of her books to the Arne Nixon Center, is the author of numerous award-winning books, including the Newbery Medal winner *Walk Two Moons*, the Newbery Honor winner *The Wanderer*, and the Carnegie Medal winner *Ruby Holler*. Her Web site is found at www.SharonCreech.com.

Walter Dean Myers, the author of *Monster*, *Shooter*, and *Autobiography of My Dead Brother*, has written many highly acclaimed books for children and young adults. He is a five-



Walter Dean Myers

Moon and Jumping the Scratch. Her novel *So B. It* was chosen as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, a Book-sense 2004 best book of the year and the 2004 Parent's Choice Gold Award. Her Web site is www.SarahWeeks.com.

A.R.T. will also perform in Visalia on Saturday, March 3, from 2-3 p.m. at the L.J. Williams Theater. For information about that performance, visit www.Visalia.k12.ca.us/library.



Answers to quiz:

- 1 *The Bad Beginning*, by Lemony Snicket
- 2 *Charlotte's Web*, by E. B. White
- 3 *Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Paterson
- 4 *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers
- 5 *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, by Dr. Seuss



Tales & Tidbits from ANCA

(Arne Nixon Center Advocates)

by Denise Sciandra, ANCA President

I'm proud that a community the size of Fresno has supported two children's book stores for more than 20 years. They are Pegasus and Petunia's Place, established in 1981 and 1982. I cannot brag about Fresno in this way any more. Pegasus closed in December.

I have told many people that it is more than coincidence that two children's book stores opened during the height of Arne Nixon's conferences. I was referring to the weekend classes that Professor Nixon offered through Fresno State in which he brought in authors and illustrators of children's books. Through those classes, Arne shared his passion for children's literature. He reached generations of teachers, parents, and librarians. They left armed with lists—best books for young readers, best illustrated books, books that heal. And they bought books that they shared with their classes and the children in their lives. Children were important back then and books were read for pleasure.

Today, thanks to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, reading is about testing, not about learning or pleasure. It's too bad for those students who attend a low-performing school. The children who could most use enrichment are tied to such things as scripted reading, data walls and leveled books. Once a school is deemed "program improvement" (PI), virtually all reading choice is eliminated. There is no time to read aloud to the class and no incentive for teachers to buy books to enrich the classroom experience.

I interviewed a teacher who discovered Harve and Margot Zemach's *The Judge* at one of Professor Nixon's workshops. "Children love it," she says. She still uses it with her classes and many times has taken her students on a field trip to the courthouse in connection with this story. If her school was identified as PI, she couldn't select that story, let alone visit a courtroom.

Another teacher says, "I miss the joy of just reading a story for the enjoyment and exposure. Everything seems to need an agenda now."

When can elementary schools return to the days of children selecting books to read for pleasure and of all teachers being allowed to take an hour from the day to read aloud to their class from books they have thoughtfully selected and purchased? Not while the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is in place.

What about Petunia's Place? Co-owner Debra Manning says that school purchase orders are down 75% with none coming for elementary schools. Schools are buying mandated series from designated sources. Even so, she feels that she offers a service. "We'll stay as long as we can," she says.

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I used to think that Accelerated Reader was the worst product I had heard of in the field of education. That's the commercial reading program in which children read books and take computerized, multiple choice tests on them. Too often these tests focus on details (to be sure the child has read the book) rather than on important and complex questions, the kind that should be discussed when children study literature. I flunked the AR tests on *The Secret Garden* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, books I had read dozens of times. I got 90% on one of my own books—a book I wrote.

As bad as Accelerated Reader is, at least it lets children choose (within limits) and read actual books. Books and choice are endangered now under new rules created by the No Child Left Behind Act. Under this, schools receive scores based on standardized tests. If a school does not "improve" as specified, draconian practices are implemented, including scripted reading lessons.

In California the most widely used scripted curriculum is Reading First. Reading First teachers are supposed to be on the same page, at the same time, every day—never mind that the children in their classes may not all be at the same stage of development, or even at the same level of speaking or understanding English. For these cookie cutter kids, Reading First prescribes everything from bulletin boards to the questions that the teacher should ask, to the one correct answer to each question. Specially funded Reading First "coaches" (some say "police") go from classroom to classroom to ensure that teachers do not deviate. Every minute is planned to maximize test scores.

In primary grades, Reading First is phonics-based, emphasizing sounds rather than interest or literary merit. In many cases textbooks are the only books allowed. "Trade books" (real books) are banned from classrooms, along with scissors, paste, and blocks.

"They took the playhouse out of my classroom today," a kindergarten teacher said recently. She was introducing herself as a newcomer at a meeting of EPATA, Educators and Parents Against Testing Abuse. This organization, founded by retired master teacher Horace "Rog" Lucido and Dr. Glenn DeVoogd, Fresno State's Reading Program Coordinator, is attracting national interest. For information see <http://testingabuse.blogspot.com>.

EPATA helped sponsor the César Chavez Conference on literacy and high stakes testing, held last year on this campus. To participate in this year's conference, March 23-24, contact Laura Alamillo at lalamillo@csufresno.edu. EPATA and the Chavez Conference can help parents, teachers, and the rest of us to fight back.

When I recall my favorite teachers, it's the quirky ones who stand out. In the fourth grade, Mrs. Kiper taught us what caricatures were, and how to draw them.

In the sixth grade, Mrs. Cosford taught us French. There were hand-lettered signs on everything in our classroom—*la pupitre, la fenêtre, le taille-crayon*. I doubt that French was part of the official elementary school curriculum at that time in Omaha, Nebraska.

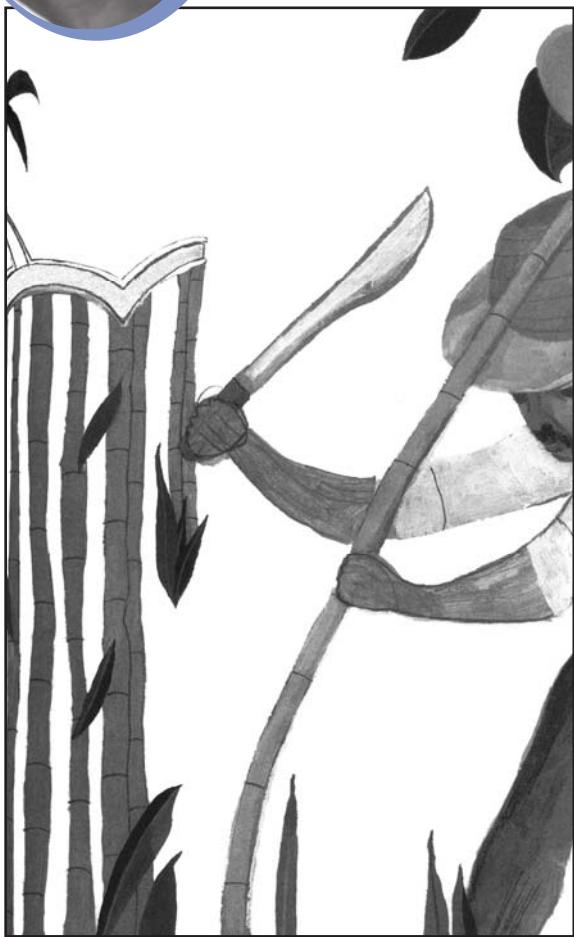
In high school I had Mr. Cox for current events. On the first day of class, he wrote a list of recommended book titles on the board. Then he crossed out two of them: *Brave New World* and *1984*. "I am *not* recommending that you read these books!" he said, pounding his desk. "I do *not* want to get fired like that teacher in Florida!" We couldn't wait to read them.

Aliki and Karen Cushman to speak on October 6

Mark your calendars now to hear author/artist Aliki and Newbery-winner Karen Cushman on Saturday, October 6, at an all-day regional workshop co-sponsored by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Plans are still being developed; more information will be published in the next edition of *The Magic Mirror*. There will be a registration fee, still to be determined. Members of the SCBWI and ANCA will receive a discount and ANCA's annual meeting (very short) will be held on this day. Save the date—October 6—so that you can help us welcome these international children's literature celebrities back to Fresno.



Thanks to artist Sean Qualls, who donated this original piece of art from *The Poet Slave of Cuba* by Fresno author Margarita Engle.



Donations of books, materials, and services

(as of January 8, 2007)

Donna Chandler: 1 book

Karen Cushman: 12 of her books & 3 boxes of papers

Sylvia L. Engdahl: 7 of her books

Margarita Engle: her new book, *The Poet Slave of Cuba*

Ivadelle Garrison-Finderup: 6 of her books

Michael Gorman: 6 books

Holiday House: 6 books

Houghton Mifflin: 54 books

Susan Jaeger: professional services

Kane/Miller Book Publishers: 24 books

Lydia Kuhn: 12 books, 32 periodicals, & 6 stuffed animals

Lerner Publishing Group: 51 books

William Loizeaux (via Farrar, Straus & Giroux): 1 book

Diane Majors: cat poster & other materials

Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Murray: 19 cat books

Rudy Najar: 1 book

Blossom Norman: 23 books

Sara Pagoulatos: 30 books

Pelican Publishing Company: 1 book

Michelle Poulton: professional services

Random House: 113 books

Roaring Brook Press: 8 books

Scholastic: 95 books

Denise Sciandra: 2 books

Byron Sewell: electronic version of his story "In the Booju Forest"

Shenanigan Books: 1 book

South Dakota State Historical Society Press: 2 books

John Taylor: 20 books

Tricycle Press: 11 books

Judy Weymouth: 49 figurines



Thanks to Alice Weiner for soft sculptures based on the John Tenniel art for *Alice in Wonderland*. (A ruler in the back shows size.)



Photo by Angelica Carpenter

Authors F. Isabel Campoy and Alma Flor Ada (left and right, respectively) with ANCA President Denise Sciandra at a recent ANCA meeting.

What would Arne say?

By Debbie Manning with Jean Fennacy

Professor Arne Nixon's most influential teaching may have occurred when he visited classrooms and shared stories with children. Teachers who were fortunate enough to watch their classes mesmerized by the power of literature and Nixon's captivating style could not help but be changed themselves. These experiences made teachers bring more literature into the classroom, and as they did, they discovered the powerful way in which good books motivate children to read. Unfortunately, today many teachers are finding it harder and harder to incorporate literature into their classrooms. Recent federal mandates are driving real literary engagement from schools and replacing it with focused lessons targeting tests. What would Arne say?

The No Child Left Behind Act places unprecedented emphasis on testing. Schools must assess students in reading and math in grades 3 through 8, and by 2014 ALL students are expected to score at the "proficient" level. Schools that fail to meet annual targets face dire consequences that can eventually lead to state takeover. The need to test makes schools focus on reading and math to the exclusion of music, the arts, literature, and even science and social studies.

Furthermore, NCLB insists that instruction in reading be "scientifically based." Federal officials define what counts as "scientific." They exclude findings from a vast amount of research in the cognitive sciences, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, language development, and social psychology. As a result, instructional practice is based only on narrow, experimental research studies. Schools where students fail to meet yearly targets, generally schools in high poverty areas and schools with large numbers of minority and immigrant children, are bearing the brunt of such instruction for it is in these schools that Reading First is often prescribed.

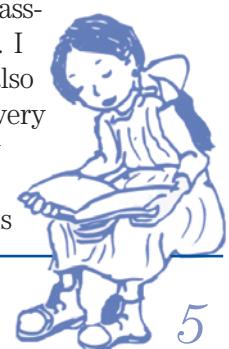
Reading First is a program that provides funds for teacher training at the elementary level. Teachers are trained to administer a one-size-fits-all "scientifically based" form of literacy instruction. They cannot deviate from the teacher's manual regardless of student needs. The pace of instruction is set, regardless of student learning. Every second of teaching is accounted for. There is no room for personalization, innovation, or creativity. Every classroom is supposed to look and sound alike. Even the arrangement of bulletin boards is explicitly prescribed for each grade level. If one were to visit several first grade classrooms on a particular day, one would expect to see the same lesson going on at the exact same time. Teachers are not to use their professional judgment; instead they disseminate a predetermined, fragmented curriculum that does not consider students' background experiences, personalities, interests, or learning styles.

Under this method, children who do not understand are given more of the same type of instruction—more worksheets and more tests. If they fall behind, they are seen as failures who need additional, after-school tutoring, which is equally fragmented and disjointed. No one is allowed to suggest that it is the curriculum that is failing the child, not the child failing the curriculum.

Over the years many children in my classes would have been deemed failures under Reading First. Take Andrew, for example. He entered my classroom as a first grader and we moved together through his fourth grade year. Though he was a year older than his classmates, he began school with no kindergarten experience. He displayed little phonemic awareness and could not read or write anything. He would have faired poorly on the currently popular DIBELS test, which requires children to read nonsense syllables aloud as fast as possible. Early on Andrew made it clear that he would not tolerate nonsense. For him, language was about meaning, not about mastering sounds in isolation. For him, reading about a fat cat that sat on a mat was absurd. He took no pleasure in books with limited vocabularies and simple plots designed for novice readers.

Yet Andrew was a brilliant child. His sophisticated sensitivity to language was apparent in his ability to engage in adult-like conversation. He told wonderful stories and had a magnificent sense of humor. He delighted in playing with language and his oral vocabulary was remarkable. He was curious; he knew that words held meaning. He enjoyed looking at picture books, often making up his own stories. Luckily for Andrew, my classroom was filled with hundreds of books. I read to him, and with him, every day. I also read several books aloud to the class every day and Andrew participated in literary discussions about those books. In fact, Andrew's contributions to those talks

(See What would Arne say? page 6)



What would Arne say?, from page 5 —

often pushed his classmates to deeper understandings of literature, as well as life. We read poetry and sang songs. We wrote throughout the day about things that mattered, and often I served as a scribe for Andrew in order to help him get his ideas down on paper. Slowly, ever so slowly, he began to read and write conventionally. By the time he completed fourth grade, he was a proficient, engaged reader and writer.

Under Reading First, Andrew would never have had the opportunity to explore real books each day, to engage in genuine conversation about literature, and to hear the number of stories that he did. He would never have been allowed the time it took for him to become proficient, because he would not have been allowed to learn at a pace that fit him. He would have been deemed a failure and I would have been forced to retain him. Social humiliation would have been constant in his academic life. I have no doubt that he would have become an early dropout, adding to the number of students our schools fail to serve.

Instead, Andrew did learn to read and write very well and he mastered math, science, music, art, and social science. He is now a junior at a University of California campus, earning As and Bs and planning to become a professor. Not bad for a kid who wasn't reading "on grade level" in third grade.

All too often those who understand the least about books, literacy, learning, and children call the shots in education. Teachers are forced to present lessons in ways that deny students access to the world of literature that Professor Nixon shared with so many of us. What would Arne Nixon say today about what goes on in many elementary classrooms in Central California? What would he say when teachers complain that they are not allowed to read literature to their students? What would he say when teachers are told that classroom libraries are no longer necessary? What WOULD he say?

Debbie Manning and Jean Fennacy, both former teachers, are co-owners of Petunia's Place bookstore. Manning teaches children's literature at Fresno State and at Fresno Pacific University. Fennacy is the Director of the graduate Language, Literacy, and Culture program at Fresno Pacific University.

A big *thank you* to Shirley Brinker!

Shirley Harnish Brinker, a founding member of the Library's Leadership Board, has made a generous donation to the Capital Campaign Fund for the new Henry Madden Library. Brinker earmarked her gift for the Arne Nixon Center, which will be housed on the third floor of the remodeled South Wing. Her donation will be used to create a dramatic entrance to the Center, adding double-sided, glass-walled display cases around the door to the reading room. The cases will provide an inviting view into the reading room while still maintaining security and they will add a sparkling showcase for exhibits.

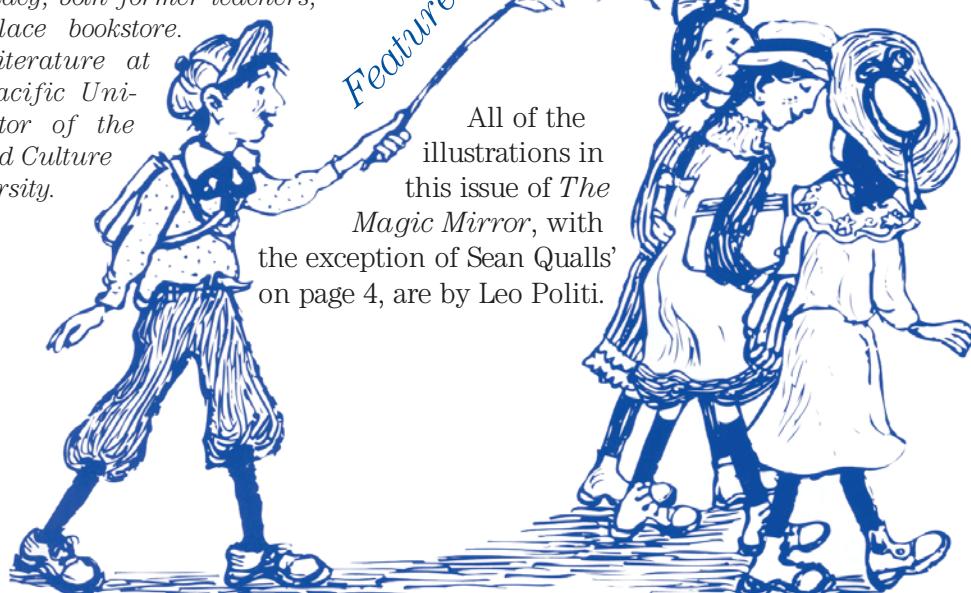
Shirley Brinker first became interested in the Arne Nixon Center when she was invited to the Beatrix Potter-themed tea held at the home of ANCA President Denise Sciandra. As a lifelong reader and cat lover (she has four cats), Brinker particularly admires the Center's collection of cat books. "I chose the Arne Nixon Center [for this gift] because I am very pleased with the work they are doing," she said. "I think it is wonderful to have a place where students and scholars can go to learn about how important children's literature is."

Shirley Brinker



Featured illustrations

All of the illustrations in this issue of *The Magic Mirror*, with the exception of Sean Qualls' on page 4, are by Leo Politi.



Lemony, from front page

movie called *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*, starring Jim Carrey and Meryl Streep. Handler's books will be available for sale and autographing after the lecture.

The Satellite Student Union is located on the north side of the campus. Enter from Barstow. Turn south on Maple Avenue, which ends at the Satellite Student Union. Free parking for this event will be available in lots J, O, and P.

Life members of ANCA, the Arne Nixon Center Advocates, will be invited to a reception before the lecture. Each member may bring one guest. Members and guests will receive free tickets to the lecture at the reception. Life members will receive a special mailing about this reception.

Tickets are available at the Information Center in the Student Union. Advance purchase is recommended; it is anticipated that this event will sell out. For information, call (559) 278-2078. Advance tickets are \$2 for Fresno State or University High students; \$6 for Fresno State faculty, staff, Alumni Association, seniors, or other students; and \$10 for general admission. General admission tickets sold on the day of the event, if available, are slightly higher in price.

The Piccadilly Inn-University, which is across the street from campus, has set aside some rooms that can be reserved, on a first come, first served basis, at the rate of \$92 per night, including tax. Call 1-800-HOTEL-US or (559) 224-4200. Ask for the "Lemony Snicket" rooms.

Tickets may also be ordered by mail. Credit cards are not accepted.

Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you would like to have tickets mailed back to you. If there is no envelope, or if there is not time to mail them, tickets will be held at "will call" at the Satellite Student Union. For questions about mail-ordered tickets, call (559) 278-6024.

SIGN ME UP!



I/We would like to join the Arne Nixon Center Advocates and enclose a donation. (Donations are tax deductible as allowable by law.)

New membership Renewal

\$ 1,000 Life membership

\$ 500 Benefactor membership

\$ 250 Patron membership

\$ 100 Sponsor membership

\$ 50 Advocate membership

\$ 25 Sustaining membership

\$ 10 Student membership

\$ Other amount



Make check payable to CSUF Foundation.

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Phone: (559) 278-8116

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Please send me tickets for "An Evening with Daniel Handler"

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail: _____

Number of tickets: _____ @ \$10 (General admission)

_____ @ \$6 (Faculty, Staff, Alumni Association, Seniors, Students from other schools)

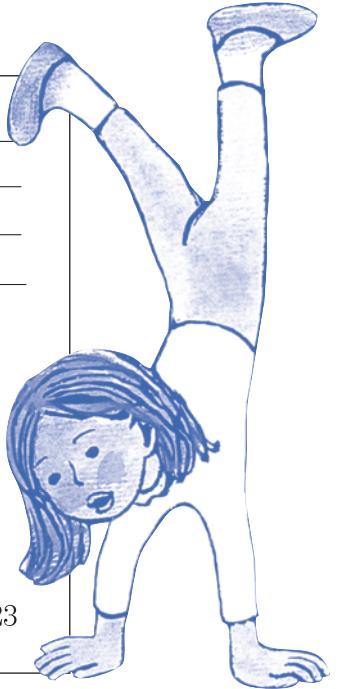
_____ @ \$2 (Fresno State or University High students)

Total amount enclosed: _____

Make check payable to CSUF Fresno Association and mail to:

Attention: Erin Kent, University Student Union, Reservation Center

California State University, Fresno, 5280 N. Jackson M/S SU36, Fresno, CA 93740-8023



Can you identify book titles from these first lines?

(Answers on page 2)

Q¹

If you are interested in stories with happy endings,
you would be better off reading some other book.



Q³

Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, bariuity, bariuity, bariuity, bariuity—Good.
His dad had the pickup going. He could get up now.

Q²

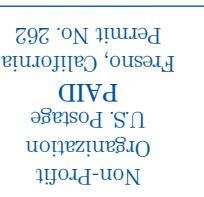
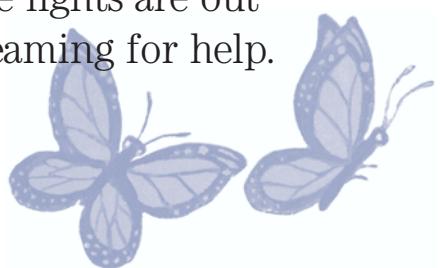
“Where’s Papa going with that ax?”

Q⁴

The best time to cry is at night, when the lights are out
and someone is being beaten up and screaming for help.

Q⁵

They still talk about it in the Kingdom of Didd as
The-Year-the-King-Got-Angry-with-the-Sky.



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