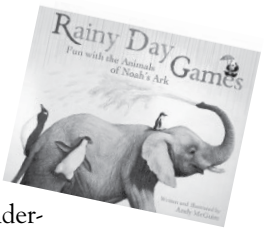
Books and resources

Rainy Day Games: Fun with the Animals of Noah's Ark, *written amd illustrated by Andy McGuire*
Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, OR, 2008). ISBN: 13:978-0-7369-2371-2.



Move over, Cat in the Hat! There is now another terrific book that imagines what wonderful and whimsical adventures might transpire on the kind of rainy day that leaves children restless and bored. *Rainy Day Games*, however, doesn't invite balancing a cake on a rake or similar disasters that the Cat wrought. Instead, it wonders what silly games like "turtle-tac-toe or tic-tac-turtle" the animals on Noah's ark might enjoy.

The book's first page, headed "Before we get started… ." has the most kid-friendly and subtly humorous introduction to the Noah's ark story I've encountered. "A flood was coming. God told Noah he needed to build a big boat for his family and two of every kind of animal. Noah probably guessed it wouldn't be easy. First of all, boats are tough to build. Also, people would laugh at him. And, of course, everybody knows llamas and rhinos hate to sail. But maybe worst of all, can you imagine staying indoors for 40 rainy days in a row? What would they do to pass the time?"

Turn the page and over the text reading, "When it's been raining night and day, and you don't know what games to play," you see a picture of a young boy, swimming goggles over his eyes and yellow "floaties" inflated on his arms, glumly staring out the window at the pouring rain. The facing page continues, "Pretend that Noah's ark floats by, and watch the games that they would try," with the little boy now gazing out the window at a chimp with a ball and an aardvark with bubbles who peer out the portholes of the ark floating past.

There ensues a riotous romp through silly suggestions, accompanied by marvelous illustrations. "Hide-and-seek can be a treat. Chameleons can be tough to beat." Or, "Jacks with yaks can be a blast. A sloth-race winner gets there last." (My daughter, 7, and niece, 5, got a giggle out of the snail and turtle depicted in the race finding an even slower animal, the sloth, which they could outpace.)

Rainy Day Games, unlike most relating to the Noah's ark story, doesn't take pains to show the animals in pairs. Older children, in fact, may note the one illustration that shows two parent penguins and a baby penguin, prompting conversation about why God wanted there to be pairs of animals to begin with.

At the end *Rainy Day Games* invites, "Try playing something from our list. And think of other games we missed. Or just sit back as clouds go by, Until God's rainbow paints the sky." I can't wait to give copies of this book to children in my life, accompanied by a set of tiddlywinks or jacks or another of the games suggested, to spark their imagination on the next rainy day … or any day they need to jumpstart their creativity. I think it would be a great addition to the bookshelf of a church-based childcare program or nursery school, a welcome resource for a Vacation Bible School, and it would be a great book for any church school leader who wants to enliven a lesson about God's good creation with this playful and imaginative delight of a book.

Reviewed by Shannon Daley-Harris, who has served the Children's Defense Fund since 1990. She has written many publications including Our Day to End Poverty: 24 Ways You Can Make a Difference *(Berrett Koehler, 2007).*

To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians, edited *by Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty*

Westminster John Knox Press (Louisvillek, 2008). ISBN: 978-0-664-23282-5, 192 pp.

Seeking to provide Christians with a relevant means to care for the "least of these," Todd Peters and Hinson-Hasty craft a volume of opportunities to engage and transform current challenges facing the globe. Climate change, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, health care, war, displaced persons, poverty, and hunger are merely a few examples cited by the editors as crises faced by what they refer to as "the human community." They encourage the church, first-world Christians, to engage in these issues and respond as people of faith.

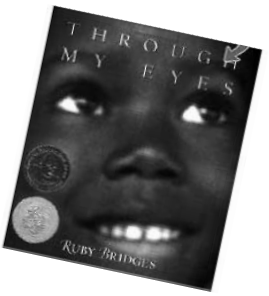
Each chapter serves as a topical response to issues raised by *A Social Creed for the Twenty-first Century,* a document provided by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the National Council of Churches to mark the 100th anniversary of the *1908 Social Creed*, a confession that served as the catalyst for the Social Gospel movement. Christian social ethicists educate, encourage, and prescribe action for issues impacting the church and the larger human community: work, families, prisoners, homeless, creation, education, and war, among others.

This topical structure invites the reader to approach the volume as a buffet of issues that can be served in small portions as appropriate to the level of engagement of the faith community in which they serve. Readers also may use this text as a small group resource to sample a range of issues to which the church is responding around the world. The text is laden with scriptural references and social justice traditions of the church that not only support, but challenge, the reader to wrestle with each issue as a person of faith. This aspect, above all, makes this engaging work a tool for conservative evangelicals as well as mainline parishioners, despite the misleading subtitle.

Reviewed by Meredith Story Williams, MDiv/MSW 2007, who is central southern regional organizer for Bread for the World.

Through My Eyes, *by Ruby Bridges*

Scholastic Press (New York, 1999). ISBN-10: 0590189239, 64 pp.



Perhaps you are familiar with the story of Ruby Bridges: the little 6-year-old Black girl who integrated the New Orleans public schools. I had read Robert Coles' account of this child who prayed for the hysterical, abusive white adults who screamed at her as she was escorted to school by the federal marshals each day. I knew there was also a picture book by Coles about Ruby and that she is considered by many to be an icon and an inspiration. But until I heard Ruby speak briefly in the summer of 2006 at Alex Haley Farm at the Proctor Institute of Child Advocacy Ministries, I hadn't really given much thought to the flesh-and-blood Ruby. What was it really like to be that 6-year-old child?

At Proctor when the adult Ruby spoke briefly, it was about her experience of being in New Orleans when Katrina hit, and of how much she had needed to sense the safe haven of Haley Farm. When I visited the sales tent, I gravitated to this book. As engaging as Coles' picture book is, it is this account in Ruby's own words that is to me the more compelling portrait of that little girl. Accompanied by quotations and excerpts from news accounts of the day and illustrated with black-and-white photo-

graphs, Ruby's own voice comes through with clarity: "When I was six years old, the civil rights movement came knocking at the door. It was 1960, and history pushed in and swept me up in a whirlwind."

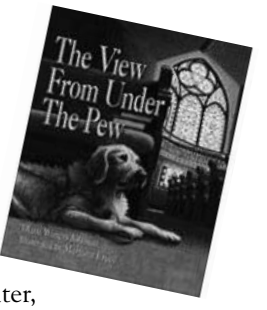
This is the account of a Black family in the south called to make the difficult decision to place their child on the front lines of school integration. Through Ruby's eyes, we see her own impressions of what was happening. Often, she was unaware of the implications of events taking place until later. With her words, we come to understand that she was just a little girl who really believed that prayer would get her through anything, one who knew that she was expected to obey her mother no matter what.

The power of this book is in painting the picture of an ordinary child made extraordinary by situations that were to shape a generation. Here we are privy to the pain experienced by her family when the pressures mounted and the confusion and uncertainty of an older Ruby when doors she and her mother assumed would be opened remained firmly shut. Here we also read of the adult Ruby and the sense of purpose that gradually transformed her life. We have evidence of the impact strong adults can have in the faith and life of a child. As the book closes Ruby comments: "I know that experience comes to us for a purpose, and that if we follow the guidance of the spirit within us, we will probably find that the purpose is a good one."

This is a book for parents to read with an older child, taking time to examine the photographs carefully and to honestly answer questions about the events of that tumultuous time. Children will find not a plaster saint to be emulated or admired from afar, but a real child like them, one who can indeed inspire them to seek their own purpose amid whatever challenges they may encounter.

Reviewed by Martha Bettis Gee, Associate for Child Advocacy, Presbyterian Church (USA), Louisville, KY.

The View from Under the Pew, *by Diane Winters Johnson, illustrations by Margaret Freed*
Abingdon Press (Nashvile, 2998).
ISBN-978-0-687-64478-0, 32 pp.



The View from Under the Pew walks us through a week with Pastor Diane (the author) who "has difficulty seeing" and her golden retriever Seeing Eye dog, Walter, whose "job is to guide her through the day so she can do her work of caring for the church."

Written for children ages 4-8, the book uses the appealing figure of Walter to spark children' s interest in a book that turns out to be more about the typical work week of a pastor than about the Seeing Eye dog that accompanies her. Even though Walter will be enough of a hook to keep most children interested, children who are expecting a more "dog-intensive" story may be a bit disappointed. ("This book would only be good for kids who go to church," commented one young reviewer.)

Johnson does a terrific job of giving kids – churched or not – a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the day-to-day life of a pastor – from Monday's meetings with people who visit her office to plan Sunday worship or "to talk about their worries, to pray, or to find help with their lives," to Tuesday hospital visitation, to Wednesday's meeting and evening potluck, to Thursday's Bible study and choir rehearsal, to Friday's laughter-filled church lunch and work preparing bulletins, and finally Sunday's worship as Walter escorts Pastor Diane to the pulpit and lies in the pew behind her.

Johnson, whose master's degree is in Christian education, does a good job of explaining church-related words that may be unfamiliar to some children, such as ordination, stole, bulletin, chaplain, and pulpit. (Interestingly, she doesn't define pew leaving one 5-year-old regular churchgoer

to guess "Is it a little church?") Johnson also teaches with a light touch about aspects of her life as a visually impaired person, explaining her computer that talks as she types, reminding the chaplain not to pet Walter when he is working, mentioning that hospital volunteers tell her how many doorways to count to find the rooms of people she will visit.

Given her educational background and the care taken to explain some things, however, I was surprised to find other elements that could have used perhaps a bit more explanation. "Difficulty seeing," the only description of her visual impairment, is pretty ambiguous. The extent of her vision impairment is further complicated by unexplained illustrations. One shows Pastor Diane's hand touching a paper on her desk, as if she might be reading Braille, but no mention was made whether she uses Braille or not.

An illustration of the Bible study class shows Pastor Diane at a chalkboard holding chalk and the text says, without helpful explanation for children, "Pastor Diane helps them read the verses and understand what each one has to say." (Adults may know that one can help someone read a verse without seeing it oneself, but that can be confusing for youngsters.)

The page that raised the most questions for one young listener refers to a picture on the church wall of Jesus with the children, saying, "The picture reminds Pastor Diane and the people at the church meeting that Jesus himself helped people." I loved the point, but it made us wonder if she could see the picture or had just been told that it was there.

Finally, no mention was made of Saturday, a curious omission given the book's day-by-day approach. Children might have appreciated seeing just what it is like when pastors are not at church, i.e., that they have homes and lives apart from the church (for the most part!)

One of the strengths of the book, for me, was the many ways it depicted not only the pastor but the whole church as actively caring about those in need, from a meeting about neighborhood children collecting shoes and supplies for children in need, to members making a quilt to sell and give the proceeds to help people who are poor. "There are difficult problems to solve, but the church and Pastor Diane are determined to help people."

Although the book may leave readers with some questions that will prompt conversation and wondering together, it does a good job of answering many others – about the life of a pastor, her church, and her Seeing Eye dog. *The View from Under the Pew* is, overall, an excellent resource for the church library and church school classroom. It would also be a great addition for those churches that offer books to young children heading into worship – that is, for kids in the pews.

– Reviewed by Shannon Daley-Harris

People

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great. Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.

Source: Kerri Hulme, The Bone People