

Paperbacks are plentiful

Gift idea: give a kid a book

By CHAROL SHAKESHAFT

Looking for a present for a kid this Christmas? Try books. This year the number of good books available for young readers is too tempting to pass by. They aren't all expensive hardcover editions either since publishers have caught on that children's books will sell just as well in paperback editions. A survey of the bookshops in the Bryan-College Station area confirmed the availability of excellent children's books, in addition to the usual trash that is passed on to parents not familiar with children's literature. One of the places to shop for children's books is World of Books, where owner Polly Howard takes special care over her choices. She even took a course in children's literature at Texas A&M so that her selections would be right.

Now on to the titles: The Whole Kids Catalog is one of the more exciting books out this year. It will appeal to the reader and nonreader alike. It is a sourcebook filled with ideas of things to do, make, and write away for. Want to know how to build a model car, where to write for a free map of the universe, how to construct a treehouse, a greenhouse, grow plants in a terrarium, fly kites, read Tarot cards, put on a magic show, or hundreds of other things? It's all in the Catalog. This is a book for both adults and kids and will provide hours of creative, challenging fun for any kid.

This year the "scratch and smell" books are a big item for younger readers. There are several titles, but they all tell a story through smells. Although short on plot, the gimmick is enjoyed by children when the appropriate spot is scratched and everything from the smell of skunks to paints tease their nostrils.

An interesting picture book for an older reader (or perhaps a favorite architecture student) is Pyramid by David MacCaulay. This book tells and shows in black and white drawings how the pyramids were constructed and how the Pharaoh was prepared for burial. It is his third book of this type following City and Cathedral.

Another picture book is William Steig's Farmer Palmer's Wagon in which a prosperous pig and his hired hand, a donkey, go to town to sell vegetables. This is a slapstick farce and is filled with hilarious misadventures to make an entertaining well written story.

The Kidnapping of Coffee Pot, by Kay Saair, is a picture book whodunit. The characters, Lawn Mower, Old Shoes, Kerosene Lamp, and Coffee Pot, are castouts in the junkyard. When Coffee Pot is kidnapped, things begin to happen in this exciting, funny and touching tale.

Finally, a picture book for Christmas. The Story of Christmas, retold by Felix Hoffman, recreates the Christmas story according to St. Luke. The beautiful and simple illustrations will make this book a yearly tradition.

For the older child, there is an abundance of good fiction available. First for the new titles, and then a look at some of the oldies but goodies that are now available in paperback.

Is That You, Miss Blue?, is the touching story of 15-year-old Flanders Brown and her year in Charles, a private school. Flanders' personal difficulties become secondary for her as she begins to be aware of the politics of the small minds that force the firing of "the best teacher at Charles" because she happens to commune with Jesus. This is a touching, powerful novel, balancing humor with a message.

Lloyd Alexander returns this year with The Wizard in the Tree, the story of a wizard, Aribcan, rescued from a tree by a young girl, Mallory, and their efforts to transport the wizard back to Vale Innis, the Land of Heart's Desire, with the help of some mortal magic. A simple, magical story in the fine Alexander tradition.

One of the nicest sets of children's

books in paperback is by C. S. Lewis and is his Narnia Chronicles. Although each volume tells a complete story, every one is an essential part of a larger epic. In the seven books, human children find themselves in Narnia, battling a world not of our own universe, but one in which we can clearly see ourselves. These books are fantasy, adventure, moral tales, and Christian analogies — but more important, they are excellent reading.

The Little House on the Prairie books are also being sold as a set in paperback. They are much better than the TV version by the same name and the story of Laura and her pioneer family is the story of our heritage and is exciting and appropriate reading for any child.

Although not sold as a set, Lloyd Alexander's Story of Prydain is a terrific blend of Welsh myth and fantasy. In these five books, Taran, the assistant pig keeper battles evil for the side of good and although he eventually receives his reward, it is not without a price.

If it is science fiction the young reader wants, there are several good paperback selections. John Christopher has written several science fiction books for kids and any of his titles are recommended. One story in three volumes, The White Mountains, The City of Gold and Lead and The Pool of Fire, tells of three boys a 100 years from now and their fight to save the world from trippods.

Enchantress from the Stars is one of the few science fiction books in which a girl is the chief character. This book tells the story of Elena who has come to destroy a terrible dragon. Besides being exciting and well written, this book is interesting because it tells the story from different points of view and three different time periods. What is a dragon to one person in a primitive time is something else to a more advanced society.

Natalie Babbit's The Search for Delicious is available in paperback and is the charming story of the search for the most delicious thing in

the world. The answer is a delightful surprise.

Julie of the Wolves, the story of an Eskimo girl left to die in the snow but who is saved by wolves, is an exciting adventure filled with interesting facts about wolves and the Eskimo culture.

M. C. Higgins the Great is the story of a boy who sits on a gleaming forty foot pole towering over his home on Sarah's Mountain. It is a story of growing up, of assuming responsibility, and of understanding the importance of saving the earth. A powerful book for a mature young reader.

About the B'Nai Bagels is a sports story of sorts. It is all about Mark who was doing OK until his mother became manager and his brother coach of the Little League team he was on.

There are hundreds of other lovely books to give for Christmas. A walk through the children's section when looking for a gift for a kid could mean that you give that child a trip to another land, a new way of seeing the world, an hour of high adventure.

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