In this issue...

Just Add Glitter (Picture Book for 4-8 year-olds) by Angela DiTerlizzi and Samantha Cotterill
(Nori Morganstein)

Educated by Tara Westover (Jim Mills)

Einstein’s Unfinished Revolution: The search for what lies beyond the quantum by Lee Smolin
(Don Boink)

Sea People: The Puzzle of Polynesia by Christina Thompson (Jim Mills)

America Before: The Key to Earth’s Lost Civilizations by Graham Hancock (Don Boink)

Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee by Casey Cep (Jim Mills)

If We Can Keep It: How the Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved
by Michael Tomasky (Don Boink)

Working by Robert A. Caro (Jim Mills)

Just Add Glitter (Beach Lane Books, 2018) Picture Book (for 4-8 year-olds)
by Angela DiTerlizzi and Samantha Cotterill

reviewed by: Nori Morganstein, Youth Services Librarian/Assistant Director

The book begins with a rainy day, and a young girl getting a sparkly package in the mail that changes everything. She opens the package to discover lots and lots of glitter. She of course then needs to add glitter to everything. She puts glitter on her toy dinosaur and on her crown. Then she moves to her bedroom where she decorates her furniture with glitter. She continues to add glitter all over her house. She and her cat have a wonderful time imagining hot air balloon rides and unicorns. The glitter helps with their play and imagination, making everything a little magical.

Eventually though, she has enough and feels lost in all the glitter. She comes to the conclusion that “the glitter made it hard to see, what sparkles most...is you and me.” Right before the book ends there’s a new package on her doorstep covered in googly eyes. There’s always something exciting and new just around the corner.

This book is a celebration of sparkles, happiness, and imagination. I’ve read it several times now, and I can’t stop smiling. It’s a story about how the simplest of things (like a little bit of glitter) can make your day better. But, it’s also about how you sometimes can have too much of a good thing. The good news is there will always be more good things out there around the corner (things like googly eyes).

The pictures are bright, colorful, and sparkly. This is also a book with a little bit of texture to it. Some of the glitter feels like glued on glitter. Kids will enjoy discovering the glittery textures on different pages. The cat provides a good balance to the story and highlights different emotions. The cat is first afraid of all the extra glitter, and hides under the table. But, eventually the girls’ happiness wears off on the cat, and the cat loves it as much as she does. It’s nice seeing when their emotions match. I can see kids being drawn both to the cat and to the exaggerated amounts of glitter.

All in all, I highly recommend this title. The sparkle will draw kids in. The creativity will keep everyone interested for the whole story. And learning that sometimes you can have too much of a good thing, provides an opening for discussion about what other things you can have too much of (for instance sugar or screen time). I’m secretly hoping there will be a sequel soon about the package of googly eyes at the end.
Educated
by Tara Westover
reviewed by Jim Mills

For most of us the trajectory of our lives, for better or worse, is determined by where we were born and who our parents are. Whether we go to college or not and our religious preferences are determined, for the most part, by the circumstances of our birth and, as is our resulting happiness in life. In that sense Tara Westover’s Educated is an inspirational memoir of an individual who was able to rise above the mean and violent circumstances of her early life and make a positive impact on the world. This is Westover’s first book and it has been near the top of the New York Times Best Seller list for over a year.

Tara Westover was born in 1986, the last of seven children, in a small rural town in South-Eastern Idaho. Her parents were fundamentalist Mormons and also what have been called survivalists. Her parents were suspicious of the Government and kept most of their children out of the public schools. They also did not believe in modern medicine, treating their children with home remedies, in some cases seriously jeopardizing their lives. When Tara was in her late teens she had never been in a school or to a hospital. There was very little that she knew about the external world except for her father’s extreme opinions. She lived in a world surrounded with weapons and piles of ammunition, hoarding of food, fuel and water for the coming of the End Time. Since she had been in her early teens she had been forced to work in her father’s junk yard, being severely injured in several instances with no concern for her safety and no professional health treatment available. She was also repeatedly severely attacked by one of her older brothers with no support from her parents. Her mother was unable to provide any protection from the aggressive instincts of Tara’s brother and the indifference of her father.

At the age of 17 Tara had decided that she wanted to go to college, in particular Brigham Young University (BYU). Her father did everything possible to prevent this from happening, since in his view a woman’s place was in the kitchen. Tara found that since she did not have a high school diploma or any official schooling at all (not even a birth certificate) that she could enter BYU by passing a series of entrance tests. She spent all of her available time studying preparatory guides for the tests and miraculously passed the test and started her academic career. In class she immediately found out how little that she knew that was common knowledge to her school mates. She was able to start pulling down A’s in her subjects that made her eligible for scholarships that provided just enough cash along with her jobs on the side to continue in college. She ended up winning the equivalent of a Rhodes scholarship to England’s Cambridge University. The recognition of her academic capacity insured the availability of funds for the continuation of her education including study at Harvard and earning a PhD at Cambridge. As she integrated into academic society she made several attempts to keep in touch with her Idaho family but the cultural gap and the lack of her family’s repentance for the past violence prevented any reconciliation.

Educated tells a story of a determined will to rise above an upbringing where ignorance, intolerance and violence were endemic. Four of Tara’s siblings were too enveloped by their family’s culture to be able to emerge. The horrors of Tara’s story is hard to acknowledge but her determination to seek a better life is certainly inspiring. Today Tara’s aspiration is to find a way to reconcile the world of her birth with her adopted academic world, to bring about a higher level of understanding across the divide splitting our country today.

Tara Westover
Einstein’s Unfinished Revolution: The search for what lies beyond the quantum
by Lee Smolin
reviewed by Don Boink

In Einstein’s Unfinished Revolution, theoretical physicist Lee Smolin provocatively argues that
the problems that have bedeviled quantum physics since its inception are unsolved and unsolvable for
the simple reason that the theory is incomplete. He believes that there is more to quantum physics
waiting to be discovered. The book covers the several theories concerning quantum physics that are
currently in vogue. First the basics, and then the various experiments that have been made. He mentions
the more significant contributors to the field.

To begin with Einstein’s theory of quantum mechanics, going back to the 1920s, precludes
realism as it is taught by the Danish scientist, Niels Bohr. This is one of the points of contention for
Smolin. He believes in his definition of realism and feels the better theories require this also. Quantum
physics behaves differently than Newtonian physics. The big difference is that particles can be in two
places at the same time. They behave as particles some times and as waves other times. This led, the
German physicist, Heisenberg to come up with the principle of “probability”. It also involved the
seeming influence of an observer. Smolin wants a realism that is the same with or without an observer.
So far there is no accounting for gravity or time in quantum physics. For those reasons Smolin feels it is
incomplete and requires more elements which are yet to be uncovered.

We are well acquainted with the three dimensions of our world. In the quantum world there a is
a multiplicity of dimensions. In “string theory, the ultimate particles are merely strings that vibrate at
different frequencies. All these esoteric notions boggle the mind of most of us, yet to me I find it
fascinating to try and follow the train of thought of people like Lee Smolin, and wish them well.

_The ‘paradox’ is only a conflict between reality and your feeling of what reality
‘ought to be’_
RICHARD FEYNMAN

_If it is correct, it signifies the end of physics as a science_
ALBERT EINSTEIN

_I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics_
RICHARD FEYNMAN

_If you are not completely confused by quantum mechanics, you do not
understand it_
JOHN WHEELER
Sea People: The Puzzle of Polynesia
by Christina Thompson
reviewed by Jim Mills

Ever since European sailors encountered an indigenous populations living on remote islands in the central Pacific Ocean, the question of the origin of these people and the puzzle of how they got there has been a major question facing scholars and historians. Following Magellan’s circumnavigation of the globe in the 1520s, making the first crossing of the Pacific, European discoverers began crisscrossing our largest ocean. This exploration culminating in the three historic voyages of Britain’s Captain Cook in the late 1700s with the European discovery of Hawaii. Two major population groups were found. The Melanesians inhabiting some of the larger islands, closer to the Asian mainland such as New Guinea and the Polynesians had spread over many remote islands enclosed within a massive triangle formed by the islands of New Zealand, Hawaii and Easter Island.

The author explores the history of our contacts with the Polynesians and the evolving theories about their origin. A continuing problem related to the mystery of how a relatively primitive people could have navigated over distances of thousands of miles, emigrated to these remote locations and then continued to maintain contacts with other inhabited islands over many centuries without the aid of any modern navigation devices such as the compass or sextant. In recent years the rediscovery and employment of ancient native navigational skills have demonstrated the ability of the Polynesians to reliably travel over thousands of miles and arrive at a distant destination. This skill is the more daunting when considering the distances involved and the small size of most of these islands. The design of these traditional Polynesian boats, generally a variation of the canoe with outriggers or multiple canoes lashed together, was sufficient to achieve the migration of hundreds or thousands of people over thousands of miles, an emigration that took place over a period of thousands of years.

The answer to the question of the origin of the Polynesians has gradually evolved along with the addition of new investigative tools available to researchers. Initial clues had to do with physical traits of the various populations, cultural artifacts, the prevailing winds and currents and the language variations encountered in each location. After WW2 radioactive carbon data techniques became available allowing the determination of the age of various archeological sites around Polynesia. It was determined that some sites such as on New Britain (near New Guinea) were three thousand years old. Some of the last islands to be inhabited were Easter Island and the Hawaiian Islands (around the year 1,000 AD) and New Zealand a few centuries later. In recent years a very powerful investigative tool has emerged with the development of genetic analysis allowing the use of DNA variations to chart the relation between different populations and to estimate the time that has elapsed since each group separated. A further tool is a measure of the genetic diversity on an island to determine the number of the initial inhabitants. Greater genetic diversity indicates a purposeful large scale migration versus the accidental discovery by a small wayward group.

The theory of Polynesian origins had always centered on southwestern Asia using the chain of islands represented by modern day Indonesia and the Philippines. The cultural aspects of Polynesian society showed possible asian origins. In 1947 a Norwegian adventurer, Thor Heyerdahl, decided to demonstrate that early South American peoples could have made the voyage across the Pacific to some of the Polynesian Islands. He and his crew built a raft, Kon Tiki, made of balsa wood. Leaving the coast of Peru the raft made it to the Tuamotu Archipelago near Tahiti in 101 days. Heyerdahl had demonstrated the possibility of South Americans making a voyage into the Polynesian triangle. The preponderance of evidence, however, including more recent DNA results have shown that the Polynesians originated in Asia and not South America. Sea People tells the remarkable story of an adventurous and resourceful people adapting to a very new and dynamic world. Their success is a tribute to the flexibility of early societies. Christina Thompson tells that story well holding the reader’s attention throughout.

Read a fascinating or intriguing book lately? Write a review (300 – 900 words) and share your experience with the BLL community. E-Mail to Jim Mills jlimills43@comcast.net and have your review printed in an upcoming BLL Book Review. If you have any comments on our reviews or if there are any particular books that you would like to see reviewed Please contact us at: jlimills43@comcast.net

The BLL Book Reviews Also appear on the Brewster Ladies Library Web Site http://www.brewsterladieslibrary.org/
This book’s author poses, what is to me, a new question. In view of the numerous sites that contain relics of man made mounds and similar artifacts that date back to remarkably ancient time periods, why has there not been found evidence of early civilizations? Chapter after chapter the author goes into great detail in describing the structures, or their remnants, of man made items that indicate a high degree of intelligence and knowledge of various cultures that existed at times that archaeologists have, more or less written off as, too early in the development of mankind for it to be possible to conceive of such sophisticated planning.

In other words they simply have not been looking for that sort of thing. Many of his comments indicate he is somewhat derisive of typical archeologists. One item he talks about at length is the period in recent history where a very influential teacher stated unequivocally that the “Clovis” era was definitely between two dates and that it marked the earliest time period. There was nothing to be found dating back from that period. This discouraged many researcher from further investigation. That is, until someone did dig deeper and found earlier artifacts.

The author is not an archeologist but a historical investigator for many years and has many books to his credit. Often when he questioned the “experts” he was shrugged off as inconsequential. One finding that poses a basic question is the apparent cessation of mound building between 2700 BC and 1700 BC. What explanation can be found for this phenomenon? Then there is found to be other interruptions in the practice at various dates. The resumption each time appears to be seamless. How does the astronomical accuracy of the time and position of solstices get transmitted forward? The conjecture is that there is a religious element that has continuity.

The several books the author has written are referred to at great length. His aim in this one is to use the weight of all the evidence to make a case for his idea that somewhere, at some time, there had to be a thriving civilization, perhaps in the Amazon rain-forest which has not been investigated archaeologically as yet. America Before is a lengthy, interesting, fact filled narrative by a man and his wife who have spent most of their life studying the past.
Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee
by Casey Cep
reviewed by Jim Mills

Furious Hours tells three interrelated stories. The first takes place in a small rural Alabama town in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It has to do with a popular local preacher and a number of unexplained deaths of five of his close relatives including two wives. The deaths were all connected by the fact that the preacher, the Reverend Willie Maxwell, had recently taken out a number of life insurance policies on the deceased with himself as the beneficiary. In one case he was tried for murder but was acquitted. At the funeral of the last victim, a relative shot Willie Maxwell at point blank range instantly killing him in plain view of dozens of mourners. The second story has to do with a prominent lawyer/politician Tom Radney. Radney was the defense attorney who represented Maxwell during his acquittal trial. He also represented his murderer during his trial and also managed to achieve an acquittal. The third part of the story has to do with Alabama’s most prominent living author, Nelle Harper Lee. Lee, was the author of one of the best selling novels of the 20th century, To Kill a Mockingbird. Lee had not produced another work in the decade and a half since producing her masterpiece.

The news of the strange events in Alabama attracted Lee’s attention and brought her back to her home state to investigate the situation as a basis for a non-fiction book. In the late 1950s and early 1960s she had accompanied her close friend and fellow Alabamian, Truman Capote, to Kansas to investigate the shocking murder of the Clutter Family. That investigation was the basis for Capote’s best seller, In Cold Blood. Harper Lee apparently saw similarities between the two situations from a human interest perspective. She spent many years, starting in the late 1970s, interviewed those involved in the Alabama case and studying court records and newspaper reports. Harper Lee was to some extent a reclusive individual. She had become very rich from the Mockingbird royalties but lived a very low key life in New York City and in Alabama. She seemed to spend at least a decade working on her new book but apparently was never sufficiently satisfied with her work to publish. It could be that her extraordinary early writing success set a bar that was too high to be matched by any future effort. She died in 2016 not having produced another major work. Her notes on her investigation have not been released.

Furious Hours, in a sense, is the book that Harper Lee never wrote. This work is Casey Cep’s first book. She has combined the Willie Maxwell and Tom Radney story with the fascinating life of Harper Lee, highlighting the curious nature of Lee’s writing career. The author manages to hold the reader’s interest throughout while introducing the many interesting characters involved in this complex story. Furious Hours is currently on the New York Times’ non-fiction best seller list and this reviewer found it to be a fascinating story with its insight into small town life in the Deep South.
To say the least this is a very timely book. Written by a journalist who has the highest credentials for authenticity, Micheal Tomasky covers the history of our country from its very beginning. To begin with he informs us the current mess we are in is not abnormal but the way it has been most of the time. The brief periods of smooth sailing were few and far between. In a very detailed and comprehensive fashion he recounts violent controversies that seemed to accompany each step of progress along the way. The title is a quote from Benjamin Franklin when he emerged from the Continental Congress and was asked, “are we a federation or a republic?” His reply was “A republic, if we can keep it.” That is discussed in great detail. Most of the history that the author recites, though interesting and informative, does not in itself answer the primary question. In the last chapters of this 221 page book does he get around to the current mess and how we got into it.

The author, a liberal Democrat, tries to be even handed in his assessment of where the blame lies concerning the two political parties. The evolution of the two parties is a story in itself. The main point is how the two became “fractured” and polarized. This sort of thing is not endemic just to the U.S., it is happening around the world. The situation had not been this bad until recently. There are so many factors that enter into how the present conditions came about. It is a prodigious job to identify these factors and then try to piece them together. I feel Tomaski has done as well, if not better than many who have attempted to do so. His bibliography is extensive so it is evident a lot of labor and consideration has been given.

In his even handed way he avoids a Trumpism by inferring an equivalence between the two parties. He comes down hard on the Republicans. His first item on the list of proposed remedies is countering the nefarious Grover Norquist and his intimidating “no taxes” pledge that has put a bind on more moderate legislators. With the advent of the Tea Party and its “no compromise edict” the gridlock it causes prevents the normal functioning of government. The previous collegiality no longer exists because legislators rush home on Friday afternoon and return to Washington on Monday afternoon in order to attend fund raising functions. Campaign expenses have become so great most of their time is spent on just that.

Perhaps the main corrupter is money from the big donors. Wealthy individuals such as the Koch brothers, or big corporations that employ well connected (frequently former legislators) lobbyists to act on their behalf. In general it is most unfortunate that the fracture has infected the entire population and the tribalism that ensued is having a detrimental effect on the entire population. Added to all that we have a president that obviously relishes the chaos and instead of being a unifier encourages this division. Our great democracy has been severely damaged and it is up to all of us to attempt to heal the fracture.
Robert A. Caro has built his career as a writer around investigating and detailing the lives of two prominent Americans, Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson. The characteristic he brings to his work is an intensity and a thoroughness possibly not found in any other biographer. He has spent nearly his entire professional life pouring over mountains of reference materials and repeatedly interviewing witnesses to the lives of his two main subjects. For those who are not familiar with Robert Moses, he was the individual who, over a forty year career, essentially shaped the city of New York. Most of the prominent highways, bridges and parks in the city and its immediate environment were conceived of and built by Robert Moses. Lyndon Johnson, of course, was the Texas Congressman and Senator and U. S. President who presided over some of the major legislative achievements of the 20th century. Both men knew how to acquire and use power, the very reason that Caro had selected them as the subjects of his lifetime work. Working is essentially the story of Caro’s pursuit of the intimate nature of these two powerful men, how they got into their positions of power and how they skillfully made use of that power. Caro also describes in detail the nature of the world in which each man functioned and how that world formed their character.

Robert Moses was never elected to any position but as Caro states had more power than any New York mayor of governor ever possessed. He did hold positions as commissioner of various city and state agencies and was to use that power to achieve his aims. His decisions were to be extremely disruptive to the lives of at least a half-million citizens. Those who were to be dispossessed of their homes to make room for the various new highways, bridges and parks. As the author points out those forced to move were invariably minorities or other low income individuals. Caro describes the building of the Northern State Parkway across Long Island that had an unusual two mile dogleg in its route. The author was able to discover that the original route would have crossed a golf course on an estate owned by an influential magnate whose contributions triggered the re-routing. The new route crossed several farms disrupting the farmers lives, in some cases driving them out of business. Moses’ career spanned the period from the 1920s through the 1960s.

Lyndon Johnson grew up in a very remote, poor section of Texas, the hill country west of Austin. This area was difficult to farm and one of the last regions to be electrified in the country. Once Johnson was elected to the U. S. Congress in 1937 his first priority was to bring the benefits of electrification to his home district. Caro describes in detail the tribulations of life living without the benefits of electricity to aid the chores of obtaining water and washing and ironing clothes. Today we have a hard time visualizing that life. Johnson was a driven dedicated individual whose achievements were all hard won. In 1943 he was elected as a Senator from Texas winning by 200 votes out of millions cast (Landslide Lyndon). Caro was able to establish after a very tedious search that the extra 200 votes were manufactured after the initial election count to put Johnson over the top. Johnson’s senate career was one of legend. As majority leader in the 1950s he made the Senate work realizing a Civil Rights bill in 1956, the first in 80 years. He had mastered the technique of influencing the votes that he needed. In 1960 he accepted the position of Vice President to Kennedy and lost all of the power and influence that he had acquired in the Senate. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 brought Johnson to his lifetime goal of being President bringing back the power that he had lost. The legislative achievements during his presidency take second place to virtually no other president, Civil Rights, Voting Rights, Medicare, Medicaid. As Caro points out Johnson would be ranked as one of the greatest of our presidents had he not bogged the nation down in Vietnam. The Vietnamese morass led to his decision not to run for reelection in 1968 and his return to the Texas hill country where he died four years later at the age of 64.

Caro’s description of his driven work habits and the thoroughness of his repertorial skills makes the reader want to learn more and read the products of his great talent: The Power Broker (Moses) 1974; The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power 1982; Means of Ascent 1990; Master of the Senate 2003; The Passage of Power 2012. Robert Caro is currently working on the fifth and final volume of the Lyndon Johnson series and at age 83 he is hopeful to complete his masterpiece. Most of these volumes involve a major commitment from the reader since they tend to run from 500 - 1200 pages each. This reviewer, having read about Caro’s dedication and work ethic, is considering doing just that but at age 80 that could also be a lifetime commitment.