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Children's Books Front and Center at Midwest Show

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By Claire Kirch – Publishers Weekly, 10/1/2009 10:40:00 AM

Children's books played a prominent part in the Midwest Booksellers Association's annual meeting and trade show, held last weekend in St. Paul. To no one's surprise, in the wake of Stephenie Meyer's incredible success with the Twilight series, YA novels that contain magic, vampires or paranormal themes were popular with booksellers trying to anticipate the next big YA hit. *Odd and the Frost Giants* by Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins), *Black Is for Beginnings* by Laurie Faria Stolarz (Flux) and *Shiver* by Maggie Stiefvater (Scholastic Press) were the three titles most mentioned by booksellers interested in tapping into the teen market.

While John McCormick, a bookseller at Northern Lights Bookstore in Duluth, Minn., said he wanted to hide somewhere for an hour or so and read Gaiman's novella, Carl Wichman, the manager at NDSU Bookstore in Fargo, N.D., has already read *Shiver* and "loves" the novel that he describes as a girl-meets-werewolf-and-falls-in-love story. "It's fabulous. It's hard to put down—even for a 56-year-old man like me," Wichman said.

Rachel Sipress, PW's junior correspondent (full disclosure, PW's midwest correspondent's 11-year-old daughter) saved her highest praises for *Hex Hall* by Rachel Hawkins (Hyperion), a March 2010 novel about a young witch that hasn't even made it onto booksellers's radar screens yet. "It's great," she pronounced, declaring it her favorite of all the galleys she picked up at the show.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, booksellers interested in cornering the children's holiday gift book market swarmed around the booth displays that included retellings of classic Christmas stories, complete with vintage-style covers and illustrations. *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* by E.T.A. Hoffman, illustrated by Gail deMarken (Scholastic/Orchard), *The Mitten* by Jim Aylesworth, illustrated by Barbara McClintock (Scholastic Press), and *The 12 Days of Christmas*, illustrated by Ilse Plume (David R. Godine) were all big hits, as were holiday picture books with original stories and holiday themes, like *Lucy's Christmas* by Donald Hall, illustrated by Michael McCurdy (David R. Godine); *Snow* by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Lauren Stringer (Harcourt); *I Saw 3 Ships* by Elizabeth Goudge, illustrated by Margot Tomes (David R. Godine); *12 Cats for Christmas* by Roger Priddy (Priddy Books); *The Spirit of Christmas* by Nancy Tillman (Feiwel and Friends); and of course, *Carl's Snowy Afternoon* by Alexandra Day (FSG).

Booksellers are increasingly conscious that they have to stock products that cannot be replicated in e-book format if they want to distinguish themselves from all the vendors pushing books in multimedia formats. At the show they also praised books that are not just appealing in terms of content, but also appeal to the eye with innovative visuals. For instance, *Otis*, written and illustrated by Loren Long (Philomel), created a buzz among booksellers, who raved about Long's evocative story of a tractor and the young calf he befriends, as well as his simple black-and-white illustrations splattered with color. Sarah Bagby, owner of Watermark Books & Cafe in Wichita, compared Long's work to the American Gothic artist Grant Woods, saying, "I love Long's use of color. I love the Midwestern landscape depicted in *Otis*, and our patrons will too." (Read a recap of Long's presentation at the MBA children's author breakfast [here](#)).

Other titles with favorable nods from booksellers were *Alphabeasties* by Sharon Werner and Sarah Forss (Blue Apple), an alphabet picture book that plays with letters, colors, and fonts; and *Through Endangered Eyes: A Poetic Journey into the Wild* by Rachel Allen Dillon (Windward Publishing).



Shiver author Maggie Stiefvater with M.T. Anderson, whose most recent book is *Jasper Dash and the Flame-Pits of Delaware*.



Some young fans show off copies of Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* and Ingrid Law's *Savvy*.

"Books with moving parts always do well," Chuck Wilder, the owner of Books on Broadway in Williston, N.D., pointed out, citing *Waddle!*, the third Scanimation book from Rufus Butler Seder (Workman), and *Watch Me Hop!* by Rebecca Young (Scholastic/Cartwheel), as two titles certain to appeal to young readers.

"There's just a lot of really good stuff this year," Ellen Scott from the Bookworm in Omaha, Neb., commented. "We're excited for the season."

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