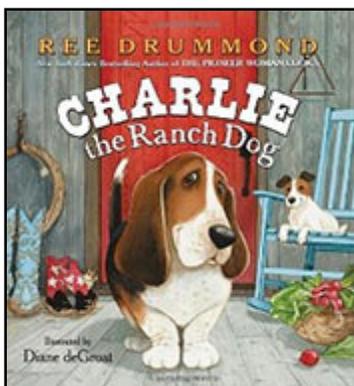


## Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- December 2011

Have I ever mentioned how much I love kids' books, other than in this column about this time every year? I have a rather extensive collection of picture books and one of my someday dreams is to write one. But not to illustrate it.

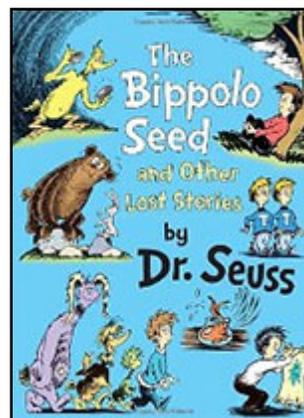
The other reason I write this December column on kids' books, is because I want everyone to read to their children. And if your children and grandchildren are too old to be read to, find some other kids by visiting a classroom or library. Reading to children is one of the greatest gifts you can give them, and the benefits last a life time.



My favorite new picture book is *Charlie the Ranch Dog* by Ree Drummond. The fact that Charlie is a real dog and a Basset Hound might have something to do with my delight, but the artist did an extraordinary job with the illustrations and the story is so clever I know you all will enjoy it.

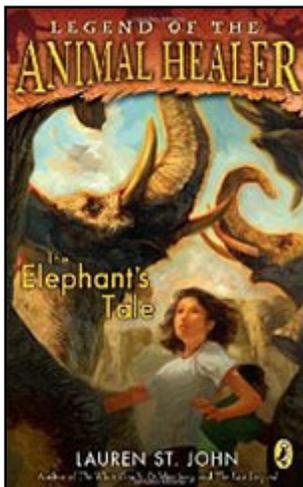
One of the pleasures of a good picture book is that the adult enjoys it as much as the children. Ree Drummond has a blog called *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman*, she also writes cookbooks and has a sometimes cooking show. I am impressed, but I love Charlie's story the best.

Dr. Seuss has a new book out, too. Yes, I know he died, but an enterprising editor went back to the early days when Dr. Seuss was writing for magazines, and took those stories to create *The Bippolo Seed and Other Lost Stories*.



Dr. Seuss should always be read aloud. I read so many of his books so many times, that I memorized them, especially “the A book”, my children’s name for the Alphabet book. “Big A, little A, what begins with A? Aunt Annie’s alligator. A, a, a.” I have a friend who has collected all the originals. I don’t care if they are first editions or not, but I want them all too.

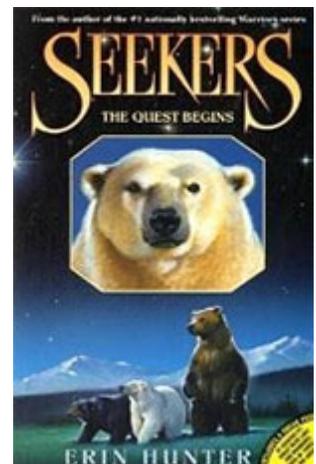
I-Can-Read books and first chapter books are the next stage for kid readers. I didn’t pick one in that category this year. Sorry.

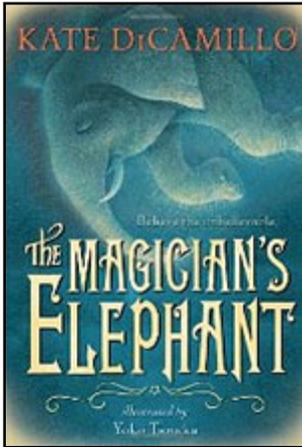


But oh, the wealth of good books in the middle readers division. Often I look for specific authors, because like other readers, when I like an author, I want to read all of their books. Lauren St. John is one of those authors. The sad thing is that *The Elephant’s Tale* is her final book in *Legend of the Animal Healer* series.

The character, Martine, starts her adventures in London, when her parents die and she is sent to her grandmother in Africa, who owns an animal sanctuary. The first tale, *The White Giraffe* absolutely caught my fancy. So did *The Dolphin Song* and *The Last Leopard*. What a great gift that set would be.

I am also reading new-to-me author Erin Hunter, who has written oodles of books. *The Quest Begins* is book one in the *Seekers* series about bears, and features two polar bear cubs. A retired librarian, who works in the bookstore in Truckee, CA introduces me to new authors every year. Great bookstore, and great lady!





Kate DiCamillo who wrote one of my favorite kid's books ever, *Because of Winn Dixie*, has a new one out, titled *The Magician's Elephant*. The story is about an elephant who is on display and very sad.

As you may already know, I have also written two youth series: *The Golden Filly* series about Trish, who races Thoroughbreds, and the *High Hurdles* series about DJ Randal's dream of being an Olympic equestrian jumper –when she doesn't even have a horse.

*What About Cimmarron?* is my stand alone novel for readers 8-12 years old and tells the story of Sarah's adventures after Mt. St. Helens erupts. All of these books can be found online or at your favorite bookstore. This spring, watch for *Dog Daze*, the first book in the *SAVE Squad* series, which I have co-written with Kathleen Wright.



Hope that gives you some ideas for your Christmas shopping list. And remember to have fun reading to the kids in your life. I know of several families who have continued the tradition of mom reading aloud every night, even though the kids are now in their teens. One woman and her husband read to each other every night, even though their children are grown and have moved out, they enjoy it so much. We all love to be read to. Merry Christmas, my friends.

Until next time,

*Happy readin' & writin' from Lauraine*