

BOOK BREAK

Give children some good books this holiday



VICTORIA DIAZ

Looking for that special little gift for that special little someone? Make it a glorious book. Herein, a list of several new titles making their marks in children's literature this holiday season:

"Swami on Rye," written and illustrated by Miura Kalman (\$16, Viking). Kalman's charming sense of humor, plus her offbeat way with words enliven yet another tale of adventure, featuring the gifted canine poet, Max. This time around, the lovable wag steps out to purchase a nice snack for his expectant wife, Crepes, only to end up touring India instead. In this "pickle of a journey," the mighty Max encounters the various and sundry, including Anna Pavlova, holy cows, and Pinky the porcupine. Eventually, he finds his way back to his "luscious fig," and this spottily plotted, dotty tale ends swell. Kalman writes not exactly for children and not exactly for those bigger people who read to them at bedtime, but mostly just for fun. Her illustrations are as goofy and inventive as her prose-poetry, and seem almost to dance across the pages.

"Miss Spider's Wedding," written

and illustrated by David Kirk (\$16.95, Scholastic). The honor of your presence is requested at this colorful ceremony in which the lovely, polka-dotted Miss Spider weds Holley, the puny little spider man she adores. He worships the ground she crawls around on, too, but before a happy ending takes place, the amorous arachnids have to get past some really sticky spots. The worst of these is one Spiderus Reeves who, in a jealous rage, nearly has Holley for dinner, before Miss Spider (definitely a '90s woman) comes to the rescue with her rolling pin. Luscious artwork simply shimmers on these pages, as if Kirk had added a dab of electricity to his paintbox. For very young children, this may not be the ideal bedtime story. Some intensely colored scenes involving the sinister Spiderus could encourage nightmares.

"The Library," by Sarah Stewart; illustrated by David Small (\$15, Farrar Straus Giroux). This Michigan husband and wife team are back again (their first collaboration was "The Money Tree"), this time to record the verified bio of one Elizabeth Brown. After falling from the sky as a baby, Elizabeth goes on to lead a rather unremarkable life, but for one exception: "She learned to read quite early/And at an incredible rate." More than anything else, Elizabeth loves to read and, as a

consequence, she surrounds herself with books. As the years go by, her collection grows into a vast personal library. And then one day, "When volumes climbed the parlor walls/And blocked the big front door,/She had to face the awful fact/She could not have one more." What to do when one is disappearing in the midst of one's favorite things? The titan-haired bibliophile's

solution may not surprise, but it will charm nonetheless. David Small's softly colored, pleasingly cluttered artwork, plus clever, out-of-frame drawings perfectly complement this slightly daffy story.

"Math Curse," by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith [(\$3.25 + \$1.75) x 3]

See BOOKS, 12D

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