

Sibling sagas

When my husband and I discussed having a second child, we questioned the timing. On the “con” side was youth; we were both only 25. Tipping the scales on the “pro” side was the feeling that our daughter needed a buddy.

We will be forever grateful for our decision but “buddy” is not a word Taylor would use to describe Seanie. On most days, it seems that the deep love I know they share is camouflaged by flying barbs, accusations and general feelings of contempt.

The optimist in me believes they will be close some day. *And To Think That We Thought That We'd Never Be Friends* (ages 4 to 10) written by Mary Ann Hoberman and illustrated by Kevin Hawkes echoes my hopes. The story begins with sibling squabbles over winning games and sharing the television and ends with the children making up. The theme expands to include neighborhood, community, national and world relations. The sing-song rhyming text rolls off the tongue, making for a perfect read-aloud book.

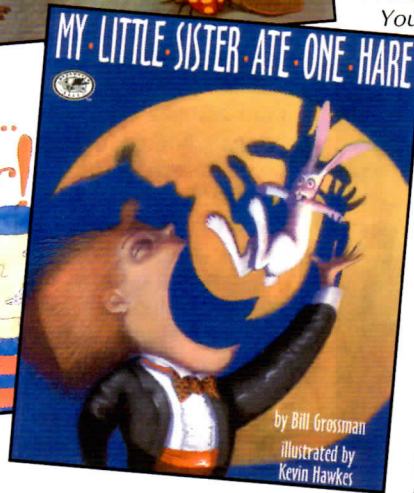
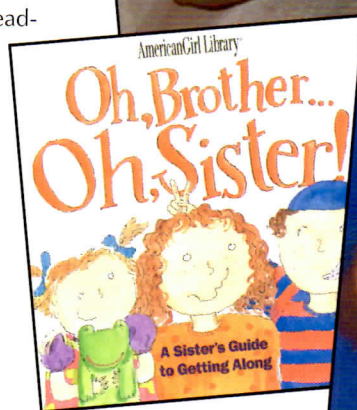
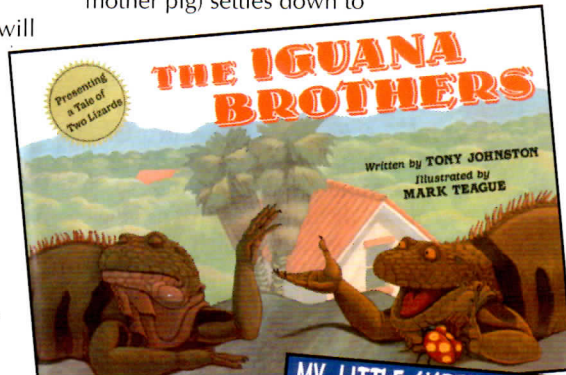
The Seven Gods of Luck (ages 4 to 10) written by David Kudler and illustrated by Linda Finch, features model siblings, however fictional. In this adaptation of a traditional Japanese folk tale, sister Sachiko and brother Kenji work together to provide a New Year's Day feast for their mother. Their sweet efforts are rewarded in this soft, charming tale.

My Little Sister Ate One Hare (ages 2 to 10) is not “soft” or “charming” but young readers will eat it up. In the format of *I Know an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly*, this rendition, written by Bill Grossman and illustrated by Kevin Hawkes, shows Little Sister ingesting anything from two snakes (“for heavens sakes”) to three ants (“she even ate their underpants”). The repetitive lines “We thought she'd throw up then and there. But she didn't,” culminate with the one thing that *has* made many a child toss cookies. I won't give it away but parents of toddlers and older children can probably guess the food culprit.

I have a theory about my children. They get along best when I'm not looking. Like other siblings two years apart, Mom's attention is worth vying for; my devotion is

the prize. I overhear them when they think I'm not around and listen to them relating and negotiating like two diplomats. The minute I step into the room, it's hand-to-hand combat and survival of the fittest.

I haven't figured out a solution yet but I know staying out of the room indefinitely isn't a viable option. I chuckled as I read *A Day With the Bellyflops* (ages 2 to 8) by Francine Bassede. After setting up a new home office, Mrs. Bellyflop (a working mother pig) settles down to



work while her little piggies play in the garden. The home office has one flaw in my opinion—a picture window that serves as a stage frame for sibling wars. Mrs. Bellyflop winds up doing playground duty throughout the story but Bassede's cheerful illustrations make the reader root for the little piggies' antics.

Another beautifully crafted picture book on sibling relationships is *Ebbie & Flo* (ages 2 to 8) by Irene Kelly. Ebbie and Flo are Atlantic Ocean salmon, a brother and sister as opposite as salmon siblings can be. Flo is brave, daring and athletic; Ebbie is not. One adorable image shows Flo attempting to steal a worm off the hook as Ebbie faints, belly up, on a rock. Ebbie gets a chance to demonstrate courage by

Mary Anne Duggan is a teacher mentor specialist for the Scottsdale Unified School District and the mother of Taylor, 11, and Seanie, 9. Reach her by e-mail at bookbag@razkids.com.



saving Flo's life. A meaty page of “Fish Facts” can be found at the book's end.

Brotherhood is cool in *The Iguana Brothers* (ages 4 to 10) written by Tony Johnston and illustrated by Mark Teague. Set in Mexico, the story follows Dom and Tom, two slick-talking lizards who spice up their conversations with Spanish phrases. In the end, they decide that brothers, even reptilian brothers, also can be friends.

A reptile is what 5-year-old Kristen's parents bring home in *Alligator Baby* (ages 2-8) written by Robert Munsch and illustrated by Michael Martchenko. Apparently, that's what happens when human parents get lost and wind up at the zoo instead of the hospital to have a baby. Kristen's parents have to make several trips back to the zoo before they bring home their real baby. Munsch, author of the classic *Love You, Forever*, scores again.

Some children grow up without siblings. Unfortunately, books about “only children” are scarce. *Little Bunny's Sleepless Night* (ages 2 to 8) written by Carol Roth and illustrated by Valeri Gorbachev follows Little Bunny, who is having trouble sleeping. Little Bunny thinks a sleepover might help, but Squirrel's midnight acorn-cracking and Skunk's accidental spraying make it difficult for Bunny to get some shut-eye. Little Bunny decides being by himself at night isn't such a bad thing.

My daughter reminisces about when she was an only child as if they were the two best years of her life. She continues attempting to cope and recently shared with me the American Girl Library book *Oh, Brother . . . Oh, Sister!: A Sister's Guide to Getting Along* (ages 8 to 12) written by Brooks Whitney and illustrated by Laura Cornell. This fun read explores the ups and downs of being a sister and offers “Super Sister Extras” such as a Sibling Constitution and Roommate Reminders.

Oh, Brother . . . Oh, Sister! shows results from a poll on the nine nicest things about being a sibling. The number one item listed is “Someone to play with.” My kids might add “especially when Mom's not looking!”

