

SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL



NEW MAGAZINES: an Evaluation

by David J. Gale

Regardless of the dismal prospects for a new magazine to succeed, at least five new magazines for children or young adults have been started in the past few years. Except for *Dollstars*, these magazines are curriculum-related. Another trend among all of the magazines is reader input. *Merlyn's Pen* is entirely student written . . .

Merlyn's Pen. *Merlyn's Pen* offers a forum for writers in grades seven to ten, and the quality of its contributions is surprisingly good. In 40-odd pages, the quarterly includes short stories, poems, plays, essays, drawings, photos, cartoons, and word games—all submitted by students, selected by an editorial panel comprised of teachers and writers, and minimally edited for publication. *Merlyn's Pen's* stated purpose, "to broaden and reward the young authors' interest in writing, strengthen the self-confidence of beginning writers, and promote among all students a positive attitude toward literature," is as appealing as the generally high-caliber, always ingenuous, student writing that it supports. Each student who submits a manuscript is promised a personal response within six to eight weeks; those who are published receive a copy of the issue in which their work appears. A four-page Teacher's Guide accompanies each class set and each individual subscription to a teacher; it offers creative suggestions for using the magazine to

highlight literary techniques. **This is a strong magazine that treats its teen readers/contributors with respect.**

Prism Magazine. While it might not be wise to look a gift horse in the mouth, a magazine billing itself as being by and for the gifted and talented does require close scrutiny. *Prism*, with its altruistic goal, glossy paper, and advisory board of educators and famous names, may at first seem to fill a need. But look closer. The printed credo states that the magazine "dedicates itself to understanding and meeting the needs of the gifted and talented for communication and for enduring relationships worldwide." The misuse of enduring in that overblown statement is indicative of the problems throughout *Prism*. Each 48-page issue is organized by theme, some of which have included knowledge and wisdom, humor and intelligence, philosophy, and the senses. Generally, essays that relate to the theme are written by the editorial staff or advisory board members, and fiction, poetry, and illustrations are contributed by the readers. One overriding problem is the pretentious tone and pompous style of the magazine. Anecdote-filled articles by adults reminisce about growing up gifted ("I feel fortunate and satisfied because I am

now well on my way to fulfilling my career aspirations despite the indirectness of my path!!"). Other essays are rife with empty aphorisms like, "fear of challenge to our own ideas can serve no better than to keep us in a state of everlasting ignorance." Another problem is finding an audience for the magazine, which claims to be directed at 10 to 18 year olds and gifted adults. That's quite a range, and while it's conceivable to produce issues with "something for everyone," this approach generally results in not enough for anyone. The most puzzling failure of *Prism* is in the low caliber of its contributions. **Merlyn's Pen, which is not specifically for the gifted and talented, publishes a consistently higher quality of work than Prism.** It is possible that many of *Prism's* poorer contributions come from younger children (*Prism* does not identify contributors by age), but many of the selections would be embarrassing even to a ten year old. What value is there in offering third-rate poetry like "Up Mr. Oak! Up with You! Alive and well! /Get up sleepy-head, yes you Mrs. Rose! /Get up Mrs. Tulip, yes, you too!" to anyone? **Looking for a magazine in which students can get their work published? Stick with Merlyn's Pen.** Interested in a forum for the gifted and talented? Keep looking.

