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Juvenile Nonfiction

About Amphibians: A Guide for Children
Cathryn Sill
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The Greeks called them “amphibia,” meaning, “living two lives.” Visitors to wetland areas are familiar with frogs, toads, and salamanders, which begin their lives in the water and move to land as adults, and kids have always been fascinated with them. Sill, an elementary teacher, has written three other wildlife guides for children and is the co-author of three bird-guide parodies. Written as an introduction to amphibians for young children, the book is illustrated by John Sill, the author’s husband.

At first glance, this is a short, simple introduction to common creatures. Each page is a fact; “Amphibians bury themselves and sleep through very cold or very hot.” A color plate illustrates the fact, and the amphibian shown is named. The animals are accurately portrayed, and the full-page plates are softly colored and filled with detail. More facts for each plate are found in the afterword. The plate illustrating the poisonous Colorado River Toad tells readers that the warts on the skin of this toad “give off a poison that burns the mouth and throat of any animal that tries to eat it,” and that this very deadly toad would probably kill or paralyze a dog who tries to bite it. The myth that toads cause warts is also disputed. Details about habitat and information about individual species accompany each plate. Some of the various amphibians include Red Salamanders, Bullfrogs, American Toads, the Gray Tree Frog and the Spring Peeper.

This is an easy introduction for young children, yet has enough information to be used for beginning research activities and would be a good purchase for school libraries. Frogs and kids have always been a popular combination, and summer wouldn’t sound like summer without the distinct call of frogs. Sill has written a factual guide for the youngest naturalist.

Tracy Fitzwater