FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Juvenile Nonfiction

Transformed
Bill Slavin
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Where do things come from? This engaging reference provides scores of answers—not to the delicately classic question of babies, but rather the pedestrian mysteries of crayons, jellybeans, and sneakers. In his first publication as author (in collaboration with Jim Slavin), seasoned illustrator Bill Slavin, whose works grace the pages of the "Good Times Travel Agency" series, among other children's books, takes young readers step-by-step down the assembly line, through the refinery, across the factory, from raw material to finished product.

A two-page spread traces the evolution of each one of a host of everyday objects: toys, foods, clothing, and miscellaneous household items like plastic wrap and band-aids. The final chapter tells the most fundamental tales of industry, describing how basic materials such as glass, iron, lumber, petroleum, and plastics are made. Information is presented in clearly numbered steps. Each segment of text is small enough to be unintimidating, but these are not fragmented "sound bites"; they are integrated parts of a process that the reader can easily follow.

On the whole, Slavin's descriptions are satisfyingly clear: plastic dolls are made from molds; footballs and soccer balls are made by stitching strips of leather together. Pencils are constructed in sheets, cut apart after ropes of graphite have been sandwiched between layers of cedar. In a few places, an overabundance of undefined terminology becomes ponderous, but Slavin's clear, appealing drawings—complete with elfin workers, representing both real and metaphorical agents—make the point when the text leaves too much unexplained.

The best descriptions are of primarily mechanical, rather than chemical, processes, such as the construction of pencils, mirrors, or the layers of material in a baseball. Some of the manufacturing steps that Slavin catalogues are comically humble: it's comforting to know, for example, that the latex that will become chewing gum is treated to remove bugs and bark first.

The introduction to each process is an informative and often charming glimpse into the history of the item: "If you were a kid in ancient Greece," reads the introduction to the

Toothpaste page, “you’d have rocks in your head every time you cleaned your teeth!” (The first toothpaste, Slavin informs his readers, was moistened powdered marble.) *Transformed* provides illuminating answers to the questions that children ask and that adults forget they’ve wondered about—remember the old ship in the bottle? Slavin *does* explain the age-old puzzle of how it got inside!

Bonnie Deigh