



Publishers Weekly, February, 25, 2008:

Ringside 1925: Views from the Scopes Trial Jen Bryant. Knopf, \$15.99 (240p) ISBN 978-0-375-84047-0. Why not break the law and bring in some tourists? Conjuring fictionalized inhabitants of crumbling Dayton, Tenn., home of the infamous Scopes “monkey trial,” Bryant (*The Trial*) lets her characters speak directly, in well-honed verse that illuminates a broad range of perspectives. Overheard near a drugstore soda fountain, scheming business owners and a publicity-chasing superintendent get permission from a popular teacher, J.T. Scopes, to arrest him for violating the Butler Act, which bans the teaching of evolution. Adventure-seeking kids, skeptical journalists, erudite scientists, curious townsfolk and one shrill evangelical all have their say on the ensuing battle between silver-tongued prosecutor William Jennings Bryan and sharp-witted defense lawyer Clarence Darrow. Bryant obviously sympathizes with Darrow and the Darwinists, but she doesn't heavily stack the deck: the eloquent insights she attributes to her characters are evenly distributed. Nor does she go out of her way to emphasize the timeliness of the topic. The colorful facts she retrieves, the personal story lines and the deft rhythm of the narrative are more than enough invitation to readers to ponder the issues she raises. Ages 12-up. (*Feb.*)



School Library Journal, March 2008:

BRYANT, Jen. *Ringside, 1925: Views from the Scopes Trial*. 228p. further reading. Web sites. CIP. Knopf. 2008. Tr \$15.99. ISBN 978-0-375-84047-0; PLB \$18.99. ISBN 978-0-375-94047-7. LC 2007007177.

Gr 8 Up—Nothing much happened in Dayton, TN, until the summer of 1925. That was the year that J. T. Scopes, a science teacher at Rhea County High School, asked students to read a chapter on evolution from their textbook. Tennessee had recently passed a law against the teaching of evolution in public schools, and the American Civil Liberties Union was seeking an opportunity to prove that this law was unconstitutional. Mr. Robinson, a local store owner, thought that Scopes could bring publicity to the town and boost its stagnant economy, if he would submit to a trial. The ACLU pledged support, and the teacher found himself in the middle of one of the most controversial trials of the century. What ensued was a circuslike atmosphere that surprised and eventually divided the residents of Dayton. This novel in verse chronicles the events and drama of the trial. There is a host of characters, both fictitious and real: J. T. Scopes (real), William Jennings Bryan (real), Mr. Robinson (real), Clarence Darrow (real), Paul Lebrun (fictitious), and many students and citizens (fictitious). The poems are in first person, giving a voice to all primary stakeholders—the citizens, young and old, who are stunned by the chaos that erupts in their tiny town. The epilogue provides information about the events and the people following the trial. Bryant offers readers a ringside seat in this compelling and well-researched novel. It is fast-paced, interesting, and relevant to many current first-amendment challenges. Students who like this novel will also enjoy Robin Brande's *Evolution, Me and Other Freaks of Nature* (Knopf, 2007).—*Pat Scales, formerly at South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Greenville*

THE HORN BOOK May/June 2008

Jen Bryant *Ringside, 1925: Views from the Scopes Trial*

223 pp. Knopf 2/08 isbn 978-0-375-84047-0 \$15.99

Library edition isbn 978-0-375-94047-7 \$18.99

(Middle School)

Bryant follows up her free-verse account of the Lindbergh Baby case (*The Trial*, rev. 3/04) with a slightly earlier media circus, John T. Scopes' trial for the teaching of human evolution, forbidden by Tennessee law. Told from the points of view of students on both sides of the controversy, merchants enjoying the (short-lived) boom, a young reporter, and others, the novel also incorporates well-chosen quotations from the trial's chief adversaries, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. While the narrative strategy allows for some explication of what was nominally at stake in the trial—the conflict between biblical literalism and scientific thought—it properly keeps the human drama at center stage, the fears and dreams and showmanship that took hold of one hot Tennessee summer. r.s.