

## Resource Links Excerpts

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### Picture Books

HANLON, Debbie

#### ***The Adventures of Gus & Isaac: Backyard Bullies***

Illustrated by Grant Boland. Breakwater Books, 2011. 32p. Illus. Gr. 1-3. 978-1-5508-1363-3. Pbk. \$12.95

Rating: E

Gus, the Seagull afraid of heights, meets his match in the tail-less cat Isaac. These two kindred spirits are on the run from bullies lurking in the backyard; Vamps, Berg and Flake. These three cats are on the prowl for trouble. High on the rooftop, beside the cherry tree, Gus sees and hears Isaac as a victim of the backyard bullies. Forgetting about his fear of flying, Gus takes one big leap, and swoops far below to allow Isaac to reach safety. These two strangers put their fears aside to help each other overcome an obstacle.

Easily written, and light-heartedly approached, the topic of bullying in ***The Adventures of Gus & Isaac: Backyard Bullies***, is a must read for young school aged children. The many social skills to be discussed include friendship and fear, safety and courage, determination and honesty. Hanlon and Boland have written and illustrated a colourful, simplistic take on bullying. Using the two characters of the cat and seagull can prompt much discussion for young readers. The style of font, and the colourful text, including the words in bold that appear in the glossary of terms at the back of the book, are creatively explored.

***Thematic Links:*** Bullying; Friendship

Adriane Pettit

### Fiction Grades 3-6

SKRYPUCH, Marsha Forchuk

#### ***Making Bombs for Hitler***

Scholastic Canada, 2012. 186p. Gr. 4-up. 978-1-4431-0730-3. Pbk. \$8.99

Rating: E

***Making Bombs for Hitler*** is a companion novel to Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's previous novel, *Stolen Child*. This novel tells the story of Lida, a young Ukrainian girl who lost her parents during World War II, and who, with her sister, is taken away from her grandparent's care by the Nazis and sent to a forced work camp. Before arriving at their final destination, the girls are separated, and Lida must do all she can to survive the conditions of deprivation and despair in the camp, clinging to the hope that one day she will be reunited with her sister.

This novel really tells two stories. On the surface, it is the story of Lida, and how she triumphs over adversity by being resourceful and optimistic, even in the face of cruelty and sadness. Lida emerges as a leader, through her compassion towards other camp workers, and by her bravery in helping to sabotage the bombs that she and the other workers are forced to manufacture for the Nazis. Her example brings courage and hope to those with whom she is imprisoned; she demonstrates empathy and humanity in the most brutal conditions, even when the adults around her treat her as though she is less than human. The novel also tells a parallel story, that of the Ostarbeiter, or East Workers. Beginning in 1943, an estimated 3 million to 5.5 million people, mostly under the age of 25, were abducted from the area of Reichskommissariat, Ukraine by the Nazis. They were used as forced laborers, with the law enabling the Nazis to use these prisoners until they died from overwork, malnutrition, and exposure. After the war

ended and the prisoners were repatriated to the Soviet Union, many were sent to work camps in Siberia or killed by their own government, as Stalin viewed these former Nazi prisoners as Nazis themselves.

This novel contains some stark and unsettling descriptions of conditions in forced work camps and the way in which prisoners were treated as expendable commodities, rather than human beings. Parents and educators may wish to use sections of the novel as a starting point for discussions about some of the events of World War II and how these events have impacted our laws today.

**Thematic Links:** World War 1939-1945 - Children; World War 1939-1945- Prisoners and Prisons; Sisters

Roxanne Burton

### **Fiction Grades 7-12**

LAWRENCE, Ian

***The Winter Pony***

Random House, 2011. 246p. Gr. 5 up. 978-0-385-73377-9. Hdbk. \$18.99

Rating: E

At the turn of the last century, there was the romance of exploration. All around the world there was titillation at the exploits of bold explorers, and no more so than for the men who would race each other to reach the South Pole: Britain's Robert Falcon Scott and Norway's, Roald Amundsen. Each approached the challenge of reaching the Pole differently. Based on his previous experiences in the Northern Arctic, Amundsen chose to travel light with dogs. Scott envisioned a more complicated scientific expedition that would include scientists, photographers and equipment such as motorized sledges, which were not unlike First World War tanks. He selected horses to be the beasts of burden to drag (on sledges) the supplies required to make it to the Pole.

The fate of the ill-fated Scott and his expedition is, of course, well known a hundred years later. The Norwegian reached the South Pole first and Scott is still lost in the ice of the last continent. The story had been known to Iain Lawrence from childhood but in revisiting it, Lawrence was completely transfixed by the Siberian ponies that accompanied Scott and who so gallantly gave their lives to the cause. Lawrence re-tells the story of both expeditions through the eyes and words of "James Pigg" (*The Winter Pony*) and in doing so creates a story of great emotion, empathy and suspense as the horses and their humans face the realities of the harsh unforgiving Antarctic landscape, and all its attending weather.

"James Pigg" is an unlikely equine hero. He is old and worn out and has been mistreated in his past life in Russia. But after being selected to go to Antarctica, he accepts his role in the quest to the pole with great enthusiasm, as he has never before in his life been kindly treated by humans - he is willing to do most anything for love, including carrying hundreds of pounds of cargo across the forbidding ice of the Antarctic. But this is not just James Pigg's story, it is also the story of the rest of the horses, and the humans attached to them as they face unbelievable danger and hardship, including killer whales, cracking ice floes, glaciers and mountains. Ultimately, for all, the finale is tragic.

If there is any criticism whatsoever for this story, it is that both the horses and the humans pretty much share human names, and it is sometimes tricky to keep the "horses" separated from the "humans", especially as James Pigg's voice in the story is in the first person.

Lawrence thoughtfully provides a map at the beginning and a chronology of both humans and horses at the end of the book. It would have been useful to have a cast of characters to reference at the beginning. Nevertheless, the story is so strong that the reader will be rushing to the Internet to access actual pictures of the expeditions as well as the diaries of the Scott expedition.

***The Winter Pony*** will rank up there among the great animal tearjerker stories. And, deservedly so - Lawrence has written a truly compelling book. To paraphrase the words that James Pigg so adored - "You're a good lad, James Pigg", well, then "You're a good lad, Iain Lawrence" for telling his story.

**Thematic Links:** Explorers; Animal Stories; Scott Expedition

Ann Letain

### **Non-Fiction Grades K-6**

URRUTIA, Maria Cristina

#### ***Who Will Save My Planet?***

Tundra Books, 2012. Unp. Illus. Gr. 3-7. 978-1-77049-281-3. Hdbk. \$11.99

Rating: G

***Who Will Save My Planet?*** is a small, wordless book with a big message. From cover to cover, full-page photographs juxtapose two different worlds: A burning rainforest opposes a flourishing canopy. A caged bird juxtaposes the same bird in its natural environment. A man using a chainsaw to fall a mature tree contrasts with a man's hands planting a seedling.

Each set of pictures would serve as a jumping off point for discussions about environmental responsibility, protection, and leadership. The book would be a good resource in support of Earth Day and other environmental stewardship curriculum, however the book provides no answers, nor does it provide any background information. Though the photographs are very impactful, some younger students may find some pictures disturbing: dead sea turtles washed up on the beach; a ring of plastic cutting into the throat of a seal; and a haphazard pile of jaguar skins beneath a gaping head.

While many of the issues are out of the realm of what children can do to change, simple acts like putting litter in garbage cans and choosing to cycle rather than ride in vehicles are attainable, positive choices the book offers children to consider.

With the above mentioned cautionary notes, ***Who Will Save My Planet?*** serves well as an introduction into a broader discussion and promotes further exploration of a topic that is not about to fade away.

***Thematic Links:*** Environmental Responsibility; Environmental Degradation; Economics; Rainforests; Lifestyle Choices; Stewardship; Endangered Species; Earth Day

Louise Sidley

### **Non-Fiction Grades 7-12**

***Dealing with Drugs Series:*** KNIGHT, Erin. ***Steroids*** (978-0-7787-5511-1); WILKINS, Jessica. ***Street Pharma*** (978-0-7787-5512-8); ADAMS, Troon Harrison. ***Marijuana*** (978-0-7787-5509-8); FIELD, Jon Eben. ***Inhalants and Solvents*** (978-0-7787-5508-1)

Crabtree Publishing, 2012. 48p. Illus. Gr. 4-8. Hdbk. \$21.56 ea.

Rating: E

The ***Dealing with Drugs Series*** tackles the serious topic of drug use and the impact that it has on the life of teenagers. These four books are part of the series - the other two are ***Party and Club Drugs*** and ***Crystal Meth***. Each book tackles a different drug family and is laid out in a similar fashion. There is a short introduction to the drug, a chapter entitled 'What's the Big Deal?', two chapters of drug specific information, then chapters on the history of the drug, dependence and addiction, seeking help, treatment and recovery, followed by resources, a glossary and an index. Each book details what the drug is, how people may begin using it and how they may acquire it. They have pull quotes with random facts about the drug. They show the effect of the drug on the body, discussing the impact of a high it can have on the user, but also the downfall of the drug and how it can destroy the body of the user. Each book ends with ways to get help if you or someone you know is addicted.

These books go into great detail about the impact that drugs can have on the mind and body of a user. The information is present in a non-judgmental and well researched way without glorifying the drug use at all. The

images presented help deliver the points that the text was making. Each book is written at about a grade four or five reading level, which does make the topic seem somewhat simplified at times but at no point takes away from the seriousness of the topic. The reading level makes the topic accessible to any child in the school and will teach them in a non-aggressive and non-judgmental way.

This series would be a great addition to a guidance office or useful for any student doing research on the topic, for personal or academic use.

**Thematic Links:** Drug Use; Addiction; Recovery

Alison Edwards

### **Professional Materials**

NESBITT, Shawntelle

***The First Nations Series for Young Readers Teacher Resource: Grades 4 -10***

Second Story Press, 2012. 148p. 978-1-926920-31-3. Pbk. \$29.95.

Rating: G

This teacher resource book is designed to be used in conjunction with the *First Nations Series for Young Readers*, which includes *Grey Wolf's Search*, *Great Musicians*, *Environmentalists*, *Men of Courage*, *Great Athletes* and *Great Women from Our First Nations*. Section 1 introduces the Traditional Medicine Wheel Teaching of the Four Aspects of Human Beings, and the two Wheels of Reflection (the Authentic Learning Wheel and the Authentic Deconstruction Approach). Section 2 incorporates the First Nation Traditional Code of Ethics with activities for teachers to use to focus student thinking on their local community in order to establish classroom codes of ethics and mottos while learning how to reflect critically about community voices and social justice issues. Section 3 focuses on ways teachers can introduce the study of biographies, specifically collective biographies, introducing how to make predictions, how to connect good communities to biographies, how communities affected the subjects of the biographies, and how the traditional code of ethics applies to the First Nations individuals highlighted in the books in the series. This section ends with ideas teachers can use to develop students' critical reflection skills in relation to the biographies they have chosen to focus on. Section 4 provides information teachers can use to have students write biographies of local first Nations people in their own community: contact log sheets and research interview questions, thick and thin questions, how to organize the writing of a biography, and critical questions students can use to evaluate the biographies that they have written. Section 5 shows teachers how to have students use what they have learned while writing biographies to transform their own community by examining issues that are percolating close to home. Section 6 is an appendix that includes general advice to teachers intending to use the preceding five sections, an excellent glossary, suitable web sites both Canadian and American, and an extensive and meaningful list of possible text resources for teachers.

Although this resource book is based on a specific series, it would prove useful for any middle school teacher who was involving students in the writing of biographies, any study of First Nations people, and the development of a human rights perspective in the classroom. The organizing tools are perfectly clear and also generic enough to apply to any variation a teacher might imagine. They will prove to be very helpful to any study of aboriginal life. Of particular value are the ideas of thick and thin questions, seeing beyond the bias and challenging the text, and the focus on both critical thinking and the development of a structured approach to writing biographies. The questions around social justice could move students' thinking beyond the personal to the world outside the classroom. This book could be used by both Canadian and American teachers to teach the writing of biographies and also to impart knowledge of successful, change-inducing First Nations peoples whose inspiring lives could transform and electrify children from all backgrounds.

**Thematic Links:** First Nations People; Native American People; Biographies; Social Justice; Community Life

Joan Marshall

## **French Materials**

DELAUNOIS, Angèle

***Le chant de mon arbre***

Illustrated by Pierre Houde. Éditions de l'Isatis, 2011. 29p. Illus. Gr. K-3. 978-2-923234-76-2. Pbk. \$13.95

Rating: E

This beautiful picture book traces the life of a tree from its earliest moments to the storm which finally ends its life. The tree is shown in all seasons and types of weather, surrounded by animals, birds and insects. The author feels close to the tree, enjoying its beauty, installing a swing from one of its large branches and carving initials in its trunk to leave proof of romance. The tree is beautiful and seemingly eternal, adding its own particular voice to the symphony of the forest.

Pierre Houde's illustrations add to the poetic and emotional feeling of this lovely book, showing children the colours of the seasons and the changes in the tree as it grows and matures.

Children will enjoy the poetry and gentle story of this book and it can be read simply as a sensitive book about nature. However the book is also a metaphor. Just as the tree continues to live on after death in the form of a violin which is very special for the author, perhaps death is not the end for humans either. Young children who have experienced the death of a loved one might find solace through the song of the tree.

***Thematic Links:*** Trees; Poetry; Music; Life after Death

Ann Ketcheson