

Picture Books

HEATHERINGTON, Coral

GUS, The Wrong-Way GOOSE Heading South

Illustrated by Eric Hetherington. Great Leaps Publishing, 2011. 28 p. Illus. Gr. K-2. 978-0-9867991-0-5. Pbk. \$10.95

Rating: G

As the title indicates this book is about a goose that has difficulty with directions. "Right from the start Gus didn't know Up from Down." Even though Gus looks, honks, hops, and swims like the other goslings, he is different. He doesn't know how he is different but his family accepts him as he is.

Gus and his family spend a lot of time practicing flying. Gus loves to fly and is "the best in the brood." Flying includes not only take off but also landing, and Gus has trouble with left and right. To adapt he uses landmarks: left is the pond and right is the grain field. His friend Melanie, the butterfly, warns him about the importance of knowing left and right because of the big flight south. On the first night of the big flight, Gus gets lost and then becomes trapped! When he is set free, Melanie finds him. They discover that during his entrapment a birding band has been fastened on Gus' right leg. This assists Gus in understanding what is left and what is right and helps him to locate his family and the flock of geese that he is travelling with.

Gus the Wrong-Way Goose Heading South is a delightful story that successfully combines a couple of dissimilar subjects: dyslexia and the habits of Canada Geese. The story is well written with a strong storyline. Coral describes Gus' emotions of embarrassment, despair, fear, pride, and happiness with empathy and understanding. She is successful in conveying that having dyslexia is a condition, not a result from any faulty environment or actions. She also does a good job of describing coping techniques. The text is illustrated in a clear and humorous fashion. Eric Hetherington uses a variety of perspectives: Gus flying way up in the sky from a fox's view; the view of the pond on the left and the field on the right is taken from behind Gus' head; flying practice from the perspective of the reader, looking down during flight from the perspective of Gus. The graphic design of the book is appealing. The text is placed within the illustrations in a most effective manner.

The end page contains factual information about both Canada Geese and dyslexia. This book is recommended for both school and public libraries. This book would have particular appeal to a dyslexic child and yet is not limited to that audience. ***Gus the Wrong-Way GOOSE Heading South*** is suitable for both story time and individual reading.

Thematic Links: Dyslexia; Canada Geese; Family; Self Confidence

Laura Reilly

Fiction Grades 3-6

GILLMOR, Don

The Time Time Stopped

Illustrated by Ashley Spires. Scholastic Canada, 2011. 151p. Illus. Gr. 3-6. 978-1-4431-0213-1. Pbk. \$7.99

Rating: E

Don Gillmor captivates young readers with his humorous approach to childhood realities. Tristan, the main character of ***The Time Time Stopped***, is faced with many troubles. When he and his family move to a new community after the school year has begun, Tristan finds it difficult to fit in. Not only does he not have any good buddies, but his parents are always working and his sister, Bella, is the meanest big sister ever! When Tristan is forced to befriend Burt Lump, the schools bully, who looks more like a potato than a young boy, his life, or at least opinion of time, is changed temporarily. Will Tristan's time ever come?

Creatively written for young readers, *The Time Time Stopped* is an entertaining read for young students. Gillmor writes about real relationships between children and families, though the creative events that occur are imaginative. The vocabulary and short chapters are straightforward and the readers are able to relate to the believable characters and most of their daily circumstances. Don Gillmor's creative use of language and literary terms had my own children ages 6 and 8, in belly laughs. The descriptions given to characters and the setting are thoughtful and provide specific visual images. There are many times in the book where one can identify the use of imagery, simile, hyperbole, etc. I would recommend this book to young independent readers grades 2-4, and as a read aloud to those younger, or for children who require more of a guided approach to reading.

Thematic Links: Identifying Relationships; Bullying; Families; Self-Confidence; Self-Esteem; Peer Pressure

Adriane Pettit

Fiction Grades 7-12

NARSIMHAN, Mahtab

The Tiffin

Dancing Cat Books, 2011. 192p. Gr. 6-9. 978-1-77086-039-1. Pbk. \$12.95

Rating: E

A glimpse at the life of an orphan in India; Kunal is 12 years old and all he's known his whole life is working as a slave for Mr. and Mrs. Seth. Believing his mom to be dead he's had no options and no place to go. Having finally taken all the abuse from Seth that he can handle, Kunal decides to run away and is taken in by a kind dabbawalla, Vinayak. As Kunal is leaving he finds out that, in reality, his mother is still alive. Kunal comes up with a plan with the help of the dabbawalla to deliver notes via the tiffins to find his mom.

There is a helpful glossary in the back of the book that defines words used throughout the novel. I learned some new words and got to see them used in context.

This novel could be used in a social studies class to explore different cultures or lifestyles.

Mahtab Narsimhan's first novel, *The Third Eye*, won the Silver Birch award. It's follow ups have been critical successes and *The Tiffin* is sure to fall into that category.

Thematic Links: Orphans; Friendship; Family; Abuse

Denise Corey

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

HUGHES, Susan

Off to Class Incredible and Unusual Schools Around the World

Owlkids Books, 2011. 64p. Illus. Gr. 4-7. 978-1-926818-86-3. Pbk. \$13.95

Rating: E

The United Nations claims education to be a basic human right, but, according to UNICEF, more than 100 million children continue to be denied the opportunity of going to school. Whether the barrier to education be environmental, political or economic, this book examines the way that incredible individuals have found ways around these barriers, by creating schools that give kids a chance to learn by meeting the very conditions where the children live.

The first chapter is dedicated to environmental barriers to school: climate change, storms, natural disasters, and

shortages of resources. Creative solutions such as the use of boats in Bangladesh that pick up children (especially girls, who would be discouraged from traveling to school) at their doorstep, schools built in remote villages in the Brazilian rainforest that run on solar light panels, and the rebuilding of schools in New Orleans and Haiti are portrayed.

The next section of the book deals with creating schools for children on the margins of society - minorities, refugees, homeless, and those living in poverty. The schools created for these children again reach out to the children where they are - schools built near slums in Cambodia, remote mountainous villages in Nepal and even in a village inside a cave in China!

The last part of the book deals with non-traditional ways of schooling, for children for whom attending school five days a week all year long is simply not an option. These schools come to the children; to the railway platforms in India where the children come every day to earn their living, and to the transient work sites of children of migrant workers in Thailand.

The entire book is full of captioned photographs of the diverse and unusual schools and the kids who attend them. Small maps on each page show the location in the world of each school. The text of each page is organized under headings, subheadings, and fact boxes. There is an extensive resource page at the end of the book listing organizations and schools that could provide more information on how to help more kids go off to class.

Thematic Links: Schools; Students; Inequality

Moira Kirkpatrick

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

FRYER, Mary Beacock

Champlain: Peacemaker and Explorer

Dundurn Press, 2011. 150p. Illus. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-55488-940-2. Pbk. \$19.99

Rating: E

Samuel de Champlain, considered by many to be “The Father of New France” is recognized as an enigmatic character in history. His ideal perception of New France is debated amongst historians, for his political objectives were unconventional to a predominately Catholic France and his relations with the Native Indians of North America were complex. Mary Beacock Fryer in ***Champlain: Peacemaker and Explorer*** goes into great detail on the relationships that Champlain held with his former countrymen in France and his various counterparts in New France. Fryer begins with an introduction on Champlain's background, noting his religious affiliations and links to the nobility of France. We get quite an extensive look into Champlain's early life, especially his times in Mexico and the Spanish contacts he maintained before maturing into a worthy seafarer. Once Champlain is crossing the Atlantic on a regular basis we are pretty well acquainted with him, and his thrust into North America comes with Europe in mind. Champlain's adventures from that point on have consequences in both continents and we are led across many Atlantic voyages as Champlain negotiates and fights for his ideals. Fryer does a wonderful job of captivating the reader, she manages to effectively interlace the politics of a religiously contentious France with the adventurous matters of Champlain in the St. Lawrence Valley. Her attention to detail serves the biographical form perfectly and her eloquent presentation does not contrast the evidence.

The layout of the book itself is perfectly designed for a reader that may not be necessarily well versed in the vernacular of the 17th century. It provides “Wordplay” insets to assist the reader on terms such as 'Huguenot', 'See' and 'Châtelaine'. The insets themselves are extremely well executed, for they are short and concise, and they are presented in a light grey background and utilize an appropriately sized font. They never obstruct the main text and are presented as an introductory technique.

Canadian history no doubt lacks the glamour and storytelling potential of other regions. What separates good history from dull history can be usually found in the details. History is after all played out by the most complex characters, and their activity is best exemplified by humanizing the details of their life. ***Champlain: Peacemaker and Explorer*** definitely humanizes Champlain, and manages to portray him in a most fair manner. It should serve well as a learning text for juvenile readers, while keeping the more mature reader interested.

Thematic Links: Samuel Champlain; Canada - History; Quebec - History; Peace Making; Exploration; Iroquois; Discovery; War

Zachary G. Chauvin

Audio-Visual Resources

The Literacy of Video Games

Tremain Media, 2009. DVD. 40min. Gr. 4 up. \$159.95 PPR

Rating: E

Video games are unmistakably a massive part of Western culture. They have very swiftly become integrated into the fabric of our children's lives and will only grow in popularity as generations mature. Such an indelible presence therefore requires careful consideration when relating their influence to education and social interaction. The youth of today and tomorrow will continue to gravitate towards interactive fantasy, just as those before them did. Where once the fantasy was derived from such mediums as books and television, the literacy and educational potential was still there. With video games there is the same sort of engendering potential along with the same sort of unfortunate peril.

The Literacy of Video Games is a video that addresses the positive roles video games can play while identifying the pitfalls that parents and teachers may face. A presence of community is first of all identified, whereby children may find like-minded peers focused upon the same sense of achievement gained through problem solving. This sense of community encourages discussion, it opens dialogue and breaks apathetic tendencies that some children may face. Most importantly it creates an access point for parents and teachers to create discourse. Rather than condemning what has become a cultural norm, the parent or teacher must recognize video game activity as part of a child's lifestyle. When the adults in their lives express a genuine and positive interest in this lifestyle, the relationships they maintain can only improve.

The video does take a critical look at violence in video games, making excellent references to empty vessel kids, or those who demonstrate a proclivity towards negative influence. It is important now, as it has always been, to steer such empty vessels in the direction of appropriate material. The type of appropriate material can only be derived through communication and research. If a parent or a teacher does not understand the video game content available then they cannot recommend or purchase that which properly fills the empty vessel. Many children do not immediately understand their area of passion, and only through exposure to unique themes will they pursue them.

The Literacy of Video Games is clearly pro-video games. It perceives video games as a sort of educational and socializing forum. While it does encourage a balanced life, including other forms of education and activities outdoors, there is no denying that video games should be considered a part of that balance. While there is some discussion on the improvement of reading abilities, a little more emphasis could have been spent on the literary relevancy of video games. Many of today's video games do not place a lot of importance on the intelligence of their content and perhaps we need to be more critical of this. Overall ***The Literacy of Video Games*** is an excellent resource that should encourage communication between parents, teachers and kids.

Thematic Links: Video Games; Literacy; Film and Animation Arts; Gaming

Zachary G. Chauvin

Professional Resources

TEXT2READER

Orca Book Publishers, 2011 - Monthly Subscription. \$175 a year, delivered electronically, \$225 hard copy.

Rating: E

TEXT2READER is a monthly reading program for grades 6 to 8 from Orca Book Publishers focussing on the books which they publish for readers in those particular grade levels.

Each issue presents engaging reading selections from award-winning books, high-interest activities and assignments, designed by teachers to connect students to the world they live in, Reading comprehension exercises, assessment rubrics, Readers Theater, graphic novel selections and more. Every activity in Text2Reader links directly to common English Language Arts learning outcomes - you can download a checklist of English Language Arts learning outcomes for your jurisdiction and grade from the website (www.text2reader.com). In that checklist, they break down which outcomes are covered in that month's issue of Text2Reader.

The issue which I previewed contained activities related to three titles - one fiction, one non-fiction and one graphic novel. Each section begins with a brief summary of the book followed by a selected chapter from the book. This is followed by a variety of activities involving comprehension, making connections, writing, research and extending the learning. Assessment rubrics are included. Following these three chapters is one entitled Readers Theatre which gives a script for the fiction selection from chapter 1. Chapter 5 gives biographical information about the authors of the various titles which are included in the issue along with some activities related to finding out more information about the authors. This is followed by a list of books and other resources which can give more information on the topics covered and a comprehensive listing of the curriculum outcomes met by the issue.

If you are using some of Orca Book Publishers titles in your classroom - and they do have an extensive listing of titles, many of which have received good and excellent ratings from our Resource Links reviewers - then this is a resource which can be very useful. For more information and to view a sample copy go to the website at www.text2reader.com

Thematic Links: Reading; Writing; Children's Literature

Victoria Pennell

French Resources

SOULIÈRES, Robert

Ma famille! L'abécédaire de la famille moderne

Soulières Éditeur, 2011. 59p. Illus. Gr. All Ages. 978-2-89607-142-5. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

There are books that stand-out and ***Ma famille!*** is one of them. A total delight! Using the alphabet, the author introduces family members, starting with his ancestors. The illustrations are endearing and the 1950 photograph of the Gendron family is priceless.

In ***Ma famille!*** we read about all kinds of families, nuclear families, adoptive families, dysfunctional families, blended families, traditional families, etc. The message Soulières is trying to convey is the importance of the family and the need to belong. He depicts characters that have an impact in our lives, including the family dog and the tooth fairy. Children will likely be able to identify themselves with some of the characters; however not everyone has a rich and snob uncle from the States or has met Mr. Ibrahim and his four demanding wives. But the author depicts each character with such wit and warmth that children will want to read the book over and over again.

In ***Ma famille!*** we also read short stories about senior citizens living in a residence, orphans, and beggars. Younger readers may not get the whole meaning of those stories and will likely rely on parents and teachers for an explanation.

Children can be invited to talk about their favourite character and the people they would like to have the opportunity to meet. It is also a book about emotions, about feelings. Children can be asked to comment on the old photograph, the clothing, the tractor, the barn, etc.

Thematic Links: The Importance of a family; The Need to Belong and to be Loved; Different Personalities

Suzanne Dagenais