

Resource Links Excerpts
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Picture Books

QAUNAQ, Sakiasi

The Orphan and the Polar Bear

Retold by Sakiasi Qaunaq. Illustrated by Eva Wiwermann. Inhabit Media, 2011. 32p. Illus. Gr. 1-4. 978-1-926569-44-4. Hdbk. \$13.95

Rating: E

Long ago, when the Inuit hunted walrus for survival, using harpoons and traveling far out along the ice on traditional dogsleds, a young orphan boy from the village was forced to accompany the men. Each time, when the hunt ended, he would be abandoned at the edge of the ice floe and would have to walk a long way back to camp in the dark. Then one time, after being abandoned once again, the orphan came face to face with a huge polar bear, which turned immediately into a very large man. He convinced the boy to travel far away with him to an island community of polar bears, where he would teach him all the skills for survival. After many eventful hunts with the bears, the orphan boy successfully learned many skills and was able to return to his village, confident as a man and a capable hunter.

This traditional legend is an excellent example of the many stories passed down through the generations by the Inuit storytellers. Though many tales were told to amuse the children, they recorded the details of the Inuit culture and traditions. Many themes and values are represented, demonstrating the importance of preserving these folktales for cultural identity. Simple, yet poignant, this beautifully written legend contains a wealth of information. Each illustration is large and dramatic. Soft, watercolours depict the cold, serene atmosphere of the north, stimulating the reader's imagination.

This text should prove valuable for classroom discussion, Inuit studies and for study units on 'folktales and legends'. It is highly recommended for an elementary school library collection.

Thematic Links: The Inuit; Culture and Traditions; Legends; Folktales

Carolyn Cutt

Fiction Grades 3- 6

CHAN, Marty

Barnabas Bigfoot: A Close Shave

Thistle-down Press, 2011. 189p. Gr. 3-6. 978-1-897235-92-8. Pbk. \$10.95

Rating: G/E

Barnabas Bigfoot: A Close Shave is the first volume in a new series by much-loved Edmonton-area author Marty Chan. The premise is that sasquatches really do exist, gracefully hiding from - and cleaning up after - "baldfaces" (humans) in the world's mountain ranges. When, on a dare, a young sasquatch reveals himself to some humans camping near his home, he sets in motion a chain of events that may put his entire clan at risk.

This is a light-hearted, quick-paced adventure story with enough chases, traps, escapes, and nefarious bad guys to satisfy any reader. There are also lots of squishy, gross details to underscore the physical comedy and reinforce the fish-out-of-water motif. Chan manages the story well, offering a reading experience that works on several levels and keeping plot interest high without giving up character development, language play, or moments of touching beauty between father and son.

Barnabas is a loveable character whom readers are sure to identify with. Although he is a sasquatch and lives in a unique society, Barnabas feels just as self-conscious as and argues with his parents just as much as any human kid. The peer-pressure situations that set the plot in motion should also feel readily identifiable. The story ends with a dramatic cliffhanger that is certain to have readers looking forward to the next book in the series.

Barnabas Bigfoot: A Close Shave is likely to be a hit with a wide audience and will make a versatile independent novel for the elementary classroom.

Thematic Links: Sasquatch; Adventure Stories

Leslie Vermeer

Fiction Grades 7-12

WALTERS, Eric and Teresa Toten.

The Taming

Doubleday Canada, 2012. 229p. Gr. 9 up. 978-0-385-67658-8. Pbk. \$14.95 (Reviewed from Uncorrected Proof)

Rating: G/E

Katie is shocked when she discovers that she has won the lead in her school's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Usually, she just fades into the woodwork at school because of her painful shyness. However, recently she has made two good friends: Travis (the oddball director of the play) and Lisa (the brilliant reclusive rich girl). When new student Evan arrives two weeks into the school year, everyone is very impressed. He is intelligent, rich and cool. Why does he suddenly take an interest in Katie?

At first, Katie is amazed that Evan is interested in her. She has never even been on a date before, and is thrilled when Evan treats her to dinner and a movie. Before she knows it, they have become a couple and are spending all of their time together. She lives with her alcoholic mother who has been through many relationships. Katie was sexually abused by one of her mother's boyfriends, and as a result, has a very difficult time forming relationships. Evan, on the other hand, appears to be a well-adjusted and popular guy. However, readers soon discover that he was accused of raping a classmate at his former private school. He reveals a very dark side when he forces Katie into sex and starts to physically abuse her.

Eric Walters and Teresa Toten have written a powerful novel about the brutal realities of high school dating. The narrative alternates between Katie's voice and Evan's voice. Katie's voice is beautifully written with a powerful undercurrent of both humility and strength of character. Her mother's neglect and alcoholism have made Katie wary of relationships, but have also taught her to become self-sufficient and to rely on her own instincts to survive. Evan, on the other hand, is a complicated young man with a dark past. His father is obsessed with wealth and status and abuses his wife. His parents provide Evan with lots of possessions, but neglect him entirely. They cover up his aberrant behaviour when he is thrown out of one private school after another. Evan's narrative voice is both disturbing and confusing. His devious plan to manipulate and control Katie both physically and sexually will send chills down readers' spines. His narrative is much less convincing when he tries to justify his actions and explain why he is the horrible person that he is.

This novel is definitely for a mature audience. The use of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* is skilfully woven into the plot. Readers who know the play will see the parallels and distinct contrasts between Petruchio and Katherina's love story, and the developing relationship between Katie and Evan.

Thematic Links: Shakespeare; Abusive Relationships; Date Rape; Acting; Social Status; Poverty; Child Abuse; Alcoholism

Myra Junyk

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

SKRYPUCH, Marsha Forchuk

Last Airlift; A Vietnamese Orphan's Rescue from War

Pajama Press, 2011. 99p. Illus. Gr. 3-6. 978-0-9869495-1-7. Pbk. \$12.95

Rating: E

Marsha Skrypuch's gift is her ability to tell the stories of underprivileged children in far away lands. Tuyet's biography demonstrates her talent. An orphan of the Vietnam War, Tuyet's dream of being adopted wanes. The orphanage is filled with babies and other perfect children and Tuyet fears that no-one will adopt a girl with a lame foot. Because she is older than the other children and has a physical disability, Tuyet believes the only way she can remain at the orphanage is to take care of the younger children. As the war is drawing to its conclusion, the city of Saigon is invaded and the children are airlifted to Canada.

Here, Tuyet must learn how to fit into a new and different life. She is terrified and confused and alone as her one friend is quickly adopted. Her story is that of a survivor of a war-torn land. How she adapts to her new homeland and to the family who finally adopts her is a heart wrenching and heart warming story.

Tuyet's story is an excellent example of the biography genre for younger students; a multi-cultural perspective on being an immigrant child in Canada, and also a snapshot of a child's life during war. This biography is a useful source for discovering the ethnic makeup of a local community and the background of an immigrant Canadian.

Highly recommended.

(I live near Brantford where both Marsha and Tuyet reside. I have met Marsha and worked with her on a special workshop for teacher-librarians at the OLA Super conference a few years ago.)

Thematic Links: Children in War; Multicultural Adoption

Sharon Armstrong

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

GERSZAK, Rafal with Dawn Hunter

Beyond Bullets

Annick Press, 2011. 127p. Illus. Gr. 6 up. 978-1-55451-293-5. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

When I first opened this book, I was captivated by the photos and layout and judged it to be yet another, albeit innovative, book on Afghanistan. I could not have been more wrong. This book is a personal story that is aimed to engage readers on a journey beyond the typical 'let's understand what is happening in Afghanistan'. Rafal Gerszak, speaking with his own voice, journals his thoughts and observations about the Afghani people he meets and photographs. The product is an educationally informative and culturally sensitive work that belongs in any equity curriculum.

Beyond Bullets fully understands the current multimedia format today's students have come to expect. It will engage students to read and beyond that to think, ask questions and seek authentic answers.

Thematic Links: War; Equity; Cultural Studies; Afghanistan; Photojournalism

Christy den Haan-Veltman

Professional Materials

BOOTH, David.

Caught in the Middle: Reading and Writing in the Transition Years

Pembroke Publishers, 2011. 176p. 978-1-55138-265-4. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: G

David Booth is Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where he has trained teachers to promote literacy for over 30 years. He has won numerous awards for his writing and his achievements in the world of education. His newest book, ***Caught in the Middle***, addresses the literacy needs of students in the Transition Years. In 2001, Booth wrote *Reading and Writing in the Middle Years* which addressed the literacy needs of students a decade ago. ***Caught in the Middle*** is his updated examination of this topic in which Booth describes the dramatic changes in the classroom environment over the last ten years. “*Just consider the impact of technology on the literacy practices of everybody -students, teachers and parents... Many schools are full of computer labs and/or laptops, SMART Boards, digital cameras, blogs, and glogs. The world is now one globe educationally, and students can have access through the Internet to people, places and information from international sources.*” (p. 5)

This book is divided into two main sections. In “Part A. Towards a Literate Future,” Booth outlines the basic concepts of an effective classroom environment. Using his own research as well as the observations of other educators and students, Booth describes effective teaching and learning strategies such as: reading aloud, differentiating teaching, using technology, using reading strategies, promoting critical reading, organizing reading and writing workshops, and keeping writer’s notebooks. In “Part B. Helping Students Find Their Voices,” educators describe authentic classroom experiences which bring to life the ideas presented by Booth in Part A. This section is divided into seven chapters addressing: student engagement, classroom environment, assessment, community, reading, writing and responding in a changing world. The variety of contributors and articles is impressive and addresses issues as far-ranging as graphic novels, blogging, Shakespeare and book clubs.

The author has provided readers with helpful strategies to improve the literacy skills of students “caught in the middle.” Particularly useful are lists of resources which can be used effectively with middle-years students. Teachers will appreciate these lists of appropriate picture books, novels, non-fiction texts and graphic novels. Although the articles in Part B of this book vary in their usefulness to the classroom environment, Booth’s wisdom and guidance shines throughout the pages of this book. His anecdotes and interpretations of current educational trends never fail to amuse and educate readers.

Thematic Links: Literacy; Writing; Reading; Technology in the Classroom; Building Community

Myra Junyk

Audio-Visual Materials

MORCOMBE, Brian

Everyone

Music With Brian, 2011. CD. Gr. Preschool - 1. Includes Lyric Booklet. \$16.99

Rating: G

“Well up on your feet”, literally you will be tapping your feet, your fingers and shaking your hips when you listen to **Everyone**, not just children but adults too.

Brian’s voice has the strength of a radio announcer that lends it self fantastically with the many characters and voices he presents to us through his journey in this exciting, colourful album. At first I was hesitant, “*oh not another children’s performer*”, however the proof of success lay with my 4-year old who wanted to listen to this album over and over again, memorizing the order of the soundtrack and lyrics, without the necessity for screen visuals. That in essence is a successful album in the eyes of a child and parent.

From Bubblegum rock, Maritime folk, eclectic, traditional and contemporary sounds this album is far from monotonous and takes us through different lands and environments like Mexico, space and the jungle. It teaches us

about surfers, cowboys, Doctors, Firemen family and friends.

The lyrics are fun, imaginative, dynamic, rhythmic and educational. A very good use of instruments from saxophone, trumpet, drums, guitar and other melodies, it allows the listener to learn of new instruments and locate which instruments are played; quite simply my 4 year old would curiously point at the images on the simple yet effective cover art and recognize which mascot is playing which instrument.

“Everyone” will enjoy this album, the kids at school and at home will love it wanting to play it and the adults will find these catchy songs making their way into subconscious during REM sleep!!!

Thematic Links: Music; Rhyme

Lara Chauvin

French Materials

KORMAN, Gordon

Titanic Tome 2: La collision

French text by Marie-Josée Briere. Éditions Scholastic 2011. 169p. Gr. 5-8. 978-1-4431-1619-0. Pbk. \$9.99

Rating: E

This second volume of Korman’s *Titanic* trilogy has been translated into French just in time for the 100th anniversary of the ship’s sinking on April 15th, 1912. The novel continues the story of four teenagers (Paddy, Alfie, Sophie, and Juliana) who are on the doomed vessel. Korman centres his story around Paddy, who has managed to board the ship as a stowaway and who is thus always trying to evade the crew and the inevitable punishment his discovery would entail. With the help of his three friends, Paddy manages to remain free almost until the end of the novel when he is finally apprehended and tossed into the ship’s brig. Of course readers know that the Titanic will eventually sink. Will Paddy go down with the ship, still imprisoned in his cell?

Korman has written a book which is excellent on many levels. Primarily, it is an adventure story as readers sympathize with Paddy and cheer for him as he continually manages to elude his pursuers. The action will keep young readers on the edge of their seats and is almost movie-like as Paddy races around the ship, overturns crates of melons in order to impede members of the ship’s crew and finds the safest place to stowaway is in one of the large trunks of a member of the upper class on a comfortable pile of expensive clothing!

There are several other elements in the plot, perhaps too many for one short novel. Sophie is the daughter of a Suffragette and so women’s liberation becomes part of the story. Juliana is the daughter of a count who drinks too much, loses at cards and plans to marry off his daughter to the son of a rich industrialist as soon as he reaches America. Alfie and the others also learn that Jack the Ripper is on board the Titanic and so yet another sub-plot is the teens’ endeavours to find and report the notorious criminal.

Although the plot is undoubtedly fiction, Korman has obviously done his research and so young readers will get a sense of the size and grandeur of the Titanic as well as having a glimpse into the inner workings of the ship such as the job of the stewards, the gradual realization that increasing speed may well increase the danger to passengers and crew, and the hell on earth endured by those hired to stoke coal in the bowels of the vessel. As well, it becomes evident that the four protagonists are of very different classes and young readers will appreciate just how firmly the lines were drawn between different social groups at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This is an excellent novel told in a fast-paced and interesting manner which makes the Titanic tragedy more personal as readers relate to one or more of the main characters. It may also spur students to spend some time researching the sinking of the Titanic in order to have more historical facts about this tragedy which seems to live in our minds even a century later.

Thematic Links: Titanic

Ann Ketcheson