

Resource Links Excerpts
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Picture Books

MCLENNAN, Stephanie Simpson

The Christmas Wind

Illustrated by Brooke Kerrigan. Red Deer Press, 2017. 32p. Illus. Gr. K-2. 978-0-88995-534-9. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: G

A young girl helps her single mom and baby brother find shelter for the night on Christmas Eve. The closest place belongs to a mean farmer though, “*even grown-ups were afraid of him.*” She derives a clever plan to enlist his help. And because of events that happened in his past, the farmer can reconcile past grief and help the family in need. He cares for the baby and makes the mom a bed on the couch, where she can enjoy the warm fire. When the young girl sees how kind the man is, she learns to relax and trust someone outside her family.

In this holiday picture book, the spirit of Christmas is shown with the giving of shelter, kindness, and hope for the future. When the story begins on Christmas Eve, there is no snow, only blowing leaves, and gusts of wind, but by Christmas Day, both the farmer and the young girl go outside to enjoy the first snow of the season. The painterly illustrations are realistic and beautiful. The colour red ties together the girl, the farmer’s house, and the cow in the barn. Emotions are expressed honestly, and with purpose. The old-fashioned stove, cradle, and homemade Christmas ornaments are reminiscent of Christmases from the past, where spending time with loved ones and family took precedent over spending money on presents.

Thematic Links: Homelessness; Christmas; Single Parent; Shelter

Tanya Boudreau

Fiction Grades 3-6

MANZER, Jenny

My Life as a Diamond

Orca Book Publishers, 2018. 161p. Gr. 4 up. 978-1-459818316. Pbk. \$10.95. (Reviewed from Advance Reading Copy)

Rating: G

This novel for young readers is about Caz, who absolutely loves baseball, and has just moved from Toronto to Seattle. Despite leaving behind his best friend Matt, Caz is given a fresh start, and quickly finds a place on a local baseball team, and makes some friends who are just as passionate about baseball. But behind his newfound fun and friendship, Caz is always worried that his friends will find out that he has a secret, and will react the same way that his old teammates did in Toronto. Caz is transgender, and started out in Toronto as the only girl on his baseball team. When he began his transition, and asked his teammates and friends to start calling him Caz or Caspar instead of Cassie.

This is a great novel for elementary grades to learn more about gender, identity, and transgender issues. Caz also has to deal with the difficulty of moving to a new town, and making new friends - all with the underlying fear that they will find out he was born female, and wondering how they will react. Filled with lots of baseball lingo and references, this is the perfect book for a die-hard baseball fan.

Thematic Links: Baseball; Gender; Transitioning; Moving; Friendship

Sarah Atkinson

Fiction Grades 7-12

RENAUD, Anne

Fania's Heart

Illustrated by Richard Rudnicki. Second Story Press, 2018. 50p. Illus. Gr. 5-8. 978-1-77260-057-5. Hdbk. \$18.95.

Rating: E

Fania's Heart is the compelling true story of one's woman's survival during World War II. Nine-year-old Sorale knows that her mother has many secrets, many of which her mother Fania doesn't share with her daughter. When she asks her mother why she has no extended family, the mom replies: "*they were swallowed up by a great darkness*". The reader learns that darkness is the Holocaust, a time in history where evil existed in the most extreme level. One day, Sorale discovers a tiny book in the shape of a heart with the letter "F" embroidered on it. When Sorale brings this book to her mother, the mother (Fania) begins to tell the story behind the existence of the book, as well as her story of survival from the infamous concentration camp known as Auschwitz. Now Fania begins to tell her daughter some secrets Sorale's always wondered about, like the number on her mother's heart or the lack of the extended family. This number was a tattoo placed on each person in the camp, with the intent to demoralize the person to think they are no longer human. Sorale also learned that her mother was separated from members of her family and never saw them again.

Fania tells of the various conditions at the concentration camp, and how the prisoners interacted to survive. On her twentieth birthday, Fania receives a cake made from several pieces of bread, and inside was the heart book. Back in their barracks, Fania learns how this book came to be, the sacrifices her friends made to create a wonderful gift. If the book had been found by the guards, the girls would be beaten or killed. A kind gesture that was 100% life threatening. This heart was not just a book, it was a testament to the courage of the young girls in Fania's barrack. Soon Sorale learns about the creators of the book as her mother begins to read the messages within the pages, most written in either Polish or Hebrew. The last line in the book "*their words saved me*" tells about the power of friendship and determination.

At the end of ***Fania's Heart*** are several pages of author's notes including a photo of the heart book as well as other photos pertaining to the people in the story. This book is currently housed at the Montreal Holocaust Museum and is considered one of the few items that survived and were created by the prisoners of Auschwitz. The illustrations in ***Fania's Heart*** are reflective of the text on each page. Scenes of Sorale and her mother in the kitchen have bright blues, greens, etc. reflecting the era of the 1950's at the beginning of the book as the story unfolds in the kitchen. In contrast, illustrations in the concentration camps are more somber-hued in shades of browns, blues, greys, dull, drab colours reflecting the stark conditions and climate at Auschwitz. Richard Rudnicki's watercolour drawings of people express very little differences in faces, reflecting the attitude that the prisoners were no longer individuals, but rather a number. The drawings evoke an emotional aura while reading ***Fania's Heart***, emotions of despair, hopelessness, fear, and sadness, giving Fania's story life!

Fania's Heart is an incredible story that is a testament to courage, resilience, love, and sacrifice during one of the darkest hours in the history of the world. It is a perfect picture book to compliment discussions around World War II, the Holocaust, and strength and weight of the written word. Although the format is that of a children's picture book, ***Fania's Heart*** is also very acceptable for use in middle grades. The message in ***Fania's Heart*** is clear, and strong; one that should be heard in schools everywhere.

Thematic Links: Holocaust; Concentration Camps; Defiance; Courage; Hope; Resilience; Friendship

Carmelita Cechetto-Shea

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

BAILEY, Linda

Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein

Illustrated by Júlia Sardà. Tundra Books, 2018. Unp. Illus. Gr. K-3. 978-1-77049-559-3. Hdbk. \$21.99

Rating: E

“*Here is Mary. She’s a dreamer.*” So begins this glorious elementary-level biography of Mary Shelley. ***Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein*** is a delightful book that tells the story of Mary Shelley in a way that’s relatable for young people, emphasizing Mary’s youth, her difficult relationship with her family, and how receptive she is to the world around her. Linda Bailey’s prose is lilting, spacious: it makes room for readers and invites us to join the story. “*How could a girl like [Mary] come up with such a story?*” she asks rhetorically. “*But you may know.*”

Júlia Sardà’s illustration style perfectly suits the story of the dreamy, sometimes troubled Mary Shelley and her creative spirit. The pictures are dark and broody, full of spooky shapes and gothic imagery. The backgrounds are muted greys, browns, and black, while bright but intense images appear in the foreground. The whole package is very appealing and apt.

Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein makes a fine complement to *Bloom* (Kyo Maclear’s 2018 book about Modernist fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli), which also profiles a creative and “difficult” young woman. Both books reassure kids - especially girls - that it’s OK to see the world in ways that others don’t. As we move through a turbulent period in our culture, books like these offer a poised and forthright strategy for helping readers to develop confidence, resilience, and determination and to meet the future with strength and security.

Timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the publication of Shelley’s novel, ***Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein*** is an outstanding example of the thoughtful, beautiful nonfiction picture books being published today. It is sure to inspire would-be writers and other imaginative minds. I heartily recommend this book for any library, public or personal - adult readers will enjoy it, too!

Thematic Links: Writers; Creativity; Imagination; Biography; Girls and Women

Leslie Vermeer

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

PAISLEY, Erinne

Can Your Conversations Change the World?

Orca Book Publishers, 2018. 160p. Illus. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-459813090. Pbk. \$14.95.

Rating: G/E

This third Erinne Paisley pop activism book tackles the topic of feminism, with chapters titled *A Different Type of Education*, *The F word*, *Your Body*, *Your Choice*, *Hashtag Equality*, *Smashing the Glass Ceiling*, *Power Projects*, *Conversations in Action*, and *The Future of Feminism*. The thorough coverage of the topic and the very readable text manage to avoid condescension. The book’s focus on the importance of conversation is a particularly admirable choice for this huge topic. The inclusion of outside sources in the midst of the “conversation” also works to make the topic accessible.

Bringing feminism under the umbrella of pop activism runs the risk of making it “cute” rather than important and this book sidesteps that hazard by bringing intersectionality into the mix early on. Acknowledging that feminism is not the same thing to everyone frees the author to address her own experiences without ignoring millions of women whose lives differ profoundly from hers.

For the most part, this personal touch works well. There are a couple of instances where it doesn’t work too well; namely the author’s criticism of the so-called gift of a sanitary pad in her school’s instruction on sexuality and the later too-casual mention of the fact that many girls in other countries cannot attend school during menstruation because they have no menstrual supplies. Intersectionality could have had more of a mention here. Perhaps the role of the cellphone in the development of women’s freedom could also have been given more mention, too.

Regardless of these omissions, this is a most accessible book for young girls and it is armed with enough concrete information to begin this important conversation.

Thematic Links: Feminism; Activism; Communication; Intersectionality; Openness

Lesley Little

French Resources

BIBEAU, Amélie

Haute voltige: Derrière le masque I (Collection Ado-Drame)

Vents d'Ouest 2018. 295p. GR. 9-12. 978-2-89537-609-5. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

Olivier Dumais leads a double life. At school, he faces cruelty and torment from his peers and struggles through a lonely school life. In the ring, however, Olivier is a celebrated and popular masked fighter, nicknamed *Sauterelle*. When a new student, Alicia, arrives at Olivier's school, the young man is smitten, but unsure how to win the affections of the popular and beautiful newcomer. Alicia quickly becomes interested in the world of fighting and it is in this venue, where Olivier is most comfortable, that he begins to build a relationship with Alicia, all while hiding his true identity. Will Alicia feel the same way for Olivier as she does for *Sauterelle*? It will only be through unmasking his true identity that Olivier will ever find out!

Author Amélie Bibeau creates an interesting universe in this fast-paced novel, one that revolves around the art of masked fighting. The strength of the novel lies in the characterization and, while the novel is presented from three differing perspectives, that of our protagonists, Olivier and Alicia, as well as that of the bully and antagonist Simon Martineau (*Marteau*), readers will feel most connected to the character of Olivier and will ultimately root for him to succeed, both in the ring and in love. The characterization is strong, however at times, more development is needed around Olivier's family life, namely the relationship with his autistic brother, as well as more development surrounding Alicia's past. The novel ends with a suspenseful conclusion and will leave readers eager for the next instalment in the series. This novel would be well suited for a class novel study or literature circle for intermediate to advanced readers and would be a great addition to school library French language sections. The novel will appeal to those with an interest in sports and the question of identity or double lives.

Thematic Links: Sports; Identity; Romance; Love; Bullying; Autism; Family; Friendship; School.

Amy J Flight