

Picture Books

NICHOL, Barbara

The Lady From Kent

Illustrated by Bill Pechet. Pedlar Press, 2018. 39p. Illus. Gr. K- Adult. 978-1-897141-87-8. Hdbk. \$23.00

Rating: E

This delightful story in verse will be a very welcome addition to both poetry and picture book sections in schools as well as being a bouncy springboard for any imagination to take off from!

The Lady (and her pet raccoon) are to be believed (or not)! The Lady apparently acquired the raccoon as a child and taught it to play the violin, gaining its lifelong fidelity and presence.

The Lady tells her life in sections - "The Early Years", "Some Worthy Acts", "Oddities and Accomplishments", "A Business Venture", "Various and Sundry Other Feats". Each adventure reaches heights of sublime absurdity and entertainment whether it's baking chocolate cake without ingredients or claiming to have invented the rake!

When the story begins to end - fittingly at The Royal Theatre, the reader has been on an amazing journey with the Lady from Kent and her violin toting companion, and it shouldn't be missed for anything.

Bill Pechet's charming and slightly subversive illustrations are the perfect pairing for Nichol's verse. There are hidden treats and messages on virtually every page. When the Lady reinvents the Zodiac, Pechet is definitely up for the challenge of illustrating the new night skies.

Nichol and Pechet have created something for everyone - young or old. ***The Lady From Kent*** is a whimsical welcome treat from two very talented imaginations.

Thematic Links: Poetry; Imagination

Anne Letain

Fiction Grades 3-6

KADARUSMAN, Michelle

Girl of the Southern Sea

Pajama Press, 2019. 224p. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-77278-081-9. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

This is how the book opens:

"Three things a girl from the slum is told never to do.

Never go out after dark.

Never walk alone.

Never disobey your father."

Nalia, her father, and younger brother live in the slums of Jakarta, Indonesia. Nalia's mother died in childbirth and she has raised her brother Rudi from infancy. Nalia's father has a banana fritter stand in the local market and when he isn't drinking, makes enough to house and feed his children but not enough to pay for Nalia's high school. She has advanced as far as she can through the public system but it ends at middle school and she wants to be a writer. Nalia has always told Rudi stories about Dewi Kadita, goddess of the Southern Sea, cursed with leprosy on land but beautiful and omnipotent in the ocean. Her mother told her about the goddess when Nalia was a little girl and Nalia has told her stories to Rudi as well as her school teachers. The school principal asks Nalia to send a story with Rudi which she does but life intervenes and she forgets that she has sent it.

On a bus trip to pay the rent before her father spends it on drink, Nalia is thrown from a bus just before it crashes. She is assisted by a stranger who accompanies her home and begins to tell anyone who will listen that she survived

so miraculously she must possess magic. He proceeds to encourage her to charge double for the now-popular “magical” fritters she is selling while her father visits their ancestral village. The father does not return and Nalia realizes that before he left, he betrothed her to the young enthusiast. Things fall apart in a big way when a mob gathers first to demand refunds for the non-magical fritters and then threatens to set fire to her for being a thief. She is saved by the old woman who tends the cemetery and then takes steps to set things right.

First, she realizes the old woman was not as fortunate as she and was disfigured by a mob attack. Second, she sets out to retrieve her father so that he can tell the enthusiast’s mother that there is no betrothal. Third, she reconnects with her best friend and together they visit the festival of the Queen of the Southern Sea. In addition to this, Nalia’s former school principal hires her as a literacy tutor so she can earn enough money to attend high school.

Author Michelle Kadarusman is Australian/Indonesian/Canadian and her insight into life in Indonesia, supplemented by her shared heritage has made this fictional story of poverty, tradition and self-determination entirely accessible and - more importantly - believable. There is a pragmatism here that transcends all the possible and imagined divisions in this story which gives it an appeal as broad as the ocean it describes.

Thematic Links: Poverty; Indonesia; Family Life; Arranged Marriage; Superstition

Lesley Little

Fiction Grades 7-12

BOW, Erin

Stand on the Sky

Scholastic Canada, 2019. 306p. Gr. 5-9. 978-1-4331-6379-8. Hdbk. \$21.99

Rating: E

Erin Bow writes fantasy and science fiction for young adults. She is the author of *Plain Kate*, *The Scorpion Rules*, and *The Swan Riders*. She has won the *Kirkus Reviews Best Book Award* and the *YALSA Best Book of the Year Award*.

The heroine of the story Aisulu lives an ancient lifestyle in modern day Mongolia, with her parents, brother, and large extended family. They are Kazakhs, a Turkic people who mainly live in Eastern Europe and the Ural Mountains. The province of Bayan-Olgii is their homeland where they practise their traditional way of life: nomadic herding, moving their animals several times a year, living in gers (a round tent) decorated with exquisite embroidery, and maintaining the custom of burkitshi, hunting with eagles. Their traditional roles are gender specific. Girls and women fetch water, milk the animals, make butter and cheese, prepare meals, embroider, and sweep the ger. Men and boys are responsible for taking the herds to pasture and back. They are also the ones who capture and train the eagles.

At the beginning of the story, we see that Aisulu does not keep within the traditional roles of the women. She does all the usual chores, but in addition she rides into the mountains with her brother Serik. On one of the occasions, they are trapped in a blizzard and later come upon an eagle in its mountain home. When Serik tries to capture the eagle, disaster strikes. The eagle attacks and both Serik and the Eagle are injured. Serik has a broken leg and the Eagle is also damaged. Aisulu rescued both, but Dulat, Aisulu’s uncle snaps the bird’s neck to put it out of its misery. Ainsulu goes back to the mountain to perform a dangerous task of rescuing the baby eagle that has been orphaned by the death of its mother.

Serik is treated at home, but when Aisulu tells her parents that she thinks Serik is hiding an illness, they whisk him off to hospital. He has bone cancer (osteosarcoma). Her family’s sudden departure with no goodbyes makes Aisulu feel abandoned, but she finds love in a new family, her uncle Dulat and his wife who treats her like a daughter. Ainsulu has a long and difficult journey to train her eagle. She also has to win the support of the others around her, especially the men because she is breaking out of her traditional role. When she learns of the costs to treat her brother and the prize money she could win in an eagle hunting competition, her sights are set. The community rallies around her and she is successful. Her brother will receive his treatment, but again Aisulu is left behind when her family goes away. She seems to come to terms with the situation, taking comfort in her new family.

This is a beautifully written book. The details of the country, the people, and their traditions are rich and authentic. The author has exhaustively researched each fact. The characters are well developed, and the plot moves seamlessly, bringing all the elements together in an engaging way. The book includes a glossary of unfamiliar (Kazakh) words and Arabic phrases, a list of names of characters in the book, and background information from the author about how she came to write this book. Middle school students, especially the girls, will love this book. It is an original. Teachers could use this book in a literature class to teach the elements of realistic fiction, plot, setting, and character development. It could be used as a supplement for a unit about eagles or multiculturalism.

Thematic Links: Kazaks; Mongolia; Eagles; Eagle Hunting; Family; Gender Roles; Traditional Cultural Roles; Heroines

Elizabeth Brown

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

HARRISON, Troon

The Birdman

Illustrated by François Thisdale. Red Deer Press, 2018. 44p. Illus. Gr. 1-4. 978-0-88995-506-6. Hdbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

This book looks at the life of Canadian ornithologist and abolitionist Alexander Milton Ross, who over the course of several years helped African American slaves escape slavery in the American South via the Underground Railroad. Under the guise of studying the birds found on the many Plantations that dotted the countryside, he was able to freely wander the area without suspicion, all the while letting slaves know about the Underground Railroad and how to travel along it without getting caught as they made their way north to freedom.

This book is an excellent resource for those studying the Canadian connection to the Underground Railroad and those people that helped the slaves that travelled along it. Also an excellent way to learn about a lesser known person in the fight to end slavery.

Thematic Links: Abolitionists; Alexander Milton Ross; Ornithologists; Fugitive Slaves; Slavery; Underground Railroad; Canada - History

Alana Schlotter

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

STEVENSON, Robin

My Body My Choice: The Fight for Abortion Rights

Orca Book Publishers, 2019. 175p. Gr. 9 up. 978-1-4598-1712-8. Pbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

My Body My Choice is a powerful work of non-fiction for teen readers that situates abortion rights historically and then almost effortlessly recontextualizes its topic as reproductive social justice. The book presents its content in a way that is visually appealing and approachable, inviting teens to recognize how abortion engages with other issues of social justice and inclusion such as race and racism, representation of disabilities, and trans rights. I cannot overstate what a vital book this is for any young person who wants to understand the most important medical rights issue of the early twenty-first century.

The content of ***My Body My Choice*** is as fascinating as it is significant. Although the author grounds the book in a Canadian context, the presentation reaches across borders and around the globe. The writing is clear and direct; the author doesn't pull punches or indulge in euphemisms. The book includes dozens of photographs representing women and men who have fought to ensure women have had the choice to end a pregnancy. It also includes

graphics, comics, profiles of young activists, and clear facts to counteract the many myths surrounding abortion, plus solid back matter for those who want definitions and further resources. Readers will finish this book with a broad comprehension of what abortion means and why it matters. The intended audience is teens, but parents, teachers, counsellors, and social workers will benefit from the clarity and leadership this book offers.

I admire this book tremendously and wish something similar had existed when I was a teen. If you are concerned about reproductive social justice - the right to have an abortion and the right to become pregnant by choice, not by chance or by circumstances - then please put this book in the hands of the young people you serve. *My Body My Choice* needs to be in every secondary school library and every teen section across the country - and it won't be: the topic is so controversial, so inflammatory. But young people need good information, and young people who care about their futures need to understand this history. Highly recommended.

Thematic Links: Sexuality; Human Rights; Feminism; Race and Racism; History; Activism; Social Justice

Leslie Vermeer

Professional

Building Bridges By Building Understanding Through Current Events

LesPlan, 2018 - 2019. On-line subscription - <https://lesplan.com>. 5 issues per year. \$120.00

Rating: G

Building Bridges By Building Understanding Through Current Events is a new teaching resource which focuses on responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action through planning and practices in teaching this aspect of current events in Canada. It's purpose is to build a better understanding of current events that impact Indigenous Peoples and all Canadians. It is composed of a series of lesson plans which present issues which can be presented in the classroom to encourage informed discussion and inquiry creating a learning environment which reflects the First Peoples Principles of Learning (<https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com>).

Each issue consists of an introduction outlining the learning outcomes, essential questions, big ideas, and how to approach the learning activities. The remainder consists of two pieces of writing which address the particular topic of each issue (the two I reviewed were on language and water). Each piece of writing has before reading activities, after reading activities and extensions which guide questioning, discussion and further research. Reproducible pages are associated with some of the activities as well as internet links which give further information and activities.

This resource is available at two levels - Level 1, Grade 5 & up, and Level 2, Grade 8 & up. In examining the two levels I found that there is very little difference in the two levels so an all grade school or one with an overlap of Grades 5 up would not necessarily need both levels. The resource is also available in French.

I would recommend this teaching resource as an adjunct to social studies and current events programs at the junior and senior high school levels. While the information pertains mainly issues affecting Indigenous Peoples it is important to all Canadians and the skills which are being developed are useful across all areas of the curriculum.

Thematic Links: Indigenous Peoples; Current Events

Victoria Pennell

French

TREMBLAY, Gabrielle (Editor)

Tout savoir series: Tout savoir sur le corps humain (978-2-89781-225-6); *Tout savoir sur la nature* (978-2-89781-224-9); *Tout savoir sur l'histoire* (978-2-89781-226-3)

Éditions Hurtubise, 2018. 80p. Illus. Gr. 7-12. Hdbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

Tout savoir sur le corps humain is an excellent introduction to physiology and medicine for almost any age group, including adults. There are five chapters which deal with the various systems and organs of the human body and how they work. Also included is a brief history of major medical discoveries, suggestions for maintaining good health and a look at the future of medicine as technology plays an ever larger role in preventing and diagnosing disease and helping those who need supports such as exoskeletons.

Tout savoir sur la nature consists of five chapters which discuss all kinds of living things on our planet. The book begins with the very first signs of life on earth and continues on with dinosaurs. Plants, insects, mammals and birds are all included in this overview of our natural world. As well, the book looks at the various habitats and biomes and how these affect the flora and fauna which live there. The final pages include an interesting and informative “Tree of life” as well as facts about the largest creatures, the fastest, and so on.

Tout savoir sur l'histoire covers world history in four chapters, beginning with pre-civilization and moving to the ancient worlds of Egypt, Greece and Rome. The mediaeval era is next, followed by a chapter which centres on great discoveries and voyages and the time of the Renaissance. Lastly the book discusses the modern world, post-1750, and includes brief items about various revolutions and wars. The final pages bring readers right into the 21st century. All books include a glossary of terms as well as an index, making them useful for students who want to quickly look up specific facts. There are detailed colour illustrations and photos as well as various types of graphs which aid in comprehension. Information is presented in small ‘bite-sized’ amounts so there is no information overload and each double-page spread has a good balance between visuals and text. These are not in-depth encyclopedia articles but rather are a quick look at a variety of wide-ranging topics in each book. Information gained here could lead to further research by students.

These three volumes live up to the expectations of other DK series of non-fiction/reference books and it is wonderful to see them translated into French. These excellent reference books are very reasonably priced and are user friendly and deserve a spot in all classrooms and libraries where there are French students.

Thematic Links: Graphic Encyclopedia; Human Body; Nature; History

Ann Ketcheson