

Picture Books

DAWE, Tom

The Wonderful Dogfish Racket

Illustrated by C. Anne McLeod. Pennywell Books/Flanker Press, 2013. Unp. Illus. Gr. K-6. 978-1-77117-286-8. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

“In the 1930’s the Newfoundland Commission of Government issued a bounty on dogfish. Fishermen were paid a small sum for all dogfish caught. Mountains of stinking fish began to pile up in many places around the coast, creating a health hazard. But the dogfish kept coming to the trawls. There was no relief until the cycle ran its course and the creatures left on their own.”

*One day, without warning,
the bay
seemed
to spin,
and under a strange cloud,
the dogfish
came in.*

Author/poet Tom Dawe has taken a piece of Newfoundland history and turned it into a rollicking tall tale which will have great appeal for a young audience. In four line rhymes Dawe tells the story of the summer when the dogfish came to the coast of Newfoundland and no matter what the people did the problem wasn’t solved until the cycle had run its course and the dogfish left allowing the cod to return for a bountiful fall fishery. Throughout the book Dawe uses a multitude of Newfoundland terms to describe this unusual happening such as:

*They tangled the bultows,
they chased every wad,
they drove the cod crazy
from soaker to scrod.*

*Dogfish on stageheads,
dogfish on bawns,
dogfish on boulders,
dogfish on lawns.*

Having lived in a Newfoundland outport for all my life, I thought I knew most of the Newfoundland terms that I could encounter, but Tom Dawe has proven different in this book. I encountered many words that I had never heard before and found myself checking in the very comprehensive glossary (7 pages) which Dawe has provided at the back of the book.

Once again Dawe has teamed up with illustrator C. Anne MacLeod and her vivid cartoonish illustrations add greatly to the text. Their earlier collaboration, *Moocher in the Lun* (2010), won the 2010 Newfoundland and Labrador Book Awards - Bruneau Family Children’s/Young Adult Literature Award, and I’m sure this book will be a contender for the next award.

This book will be a great read-aloud for younger children and would also make for an interesting study of Newfoundland terms for young readers and could certainly be a great addition to a Newfoundland history course at any grade level.

Thematic Links: Dogfish; Newfoundland History; Poetry

Victoria Pennell

Fiction Grades 3-6

MACLEAN, Jill

The Hidden Agenda of Sigrid Sugden

Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2013. 235p. Gr. 4-8. 978-1-55455-279-5. Pbk. \$11.95

Rating: E

This novel is the third installment in Jill MacLean's award-winning series about a group of middle-school children in a small Newfoundland village. Sigrid Sugden was one of a trio of girls known as the Shrikes who have been bullying their classmates, including Prinny Murphy in the previous novel, *The Present Tense of Prinny Murphy*. Tate is the leader, Mel is the enforcer, and Sigrid uses her smart phone to take pictures which they use for extortion. Their victims are so afraid of them that no one has told parents or school authorities. But one day the Shrikes force Prinny to flee from them into a small fishing dory, and when the tide turns, she is at risk of being washed out of the bay onto dangerous rocks. Sigrid realizes they have gone too far, and anonymously calls Prinny's father to rescue her. When all three are summoned, with their parents, to speak to the principal, Sigrid decides it is time for a change. Sigrid's mean girl behavior seems to be linked to her parents' divorce and her absentee, shopping-obsessed mother. Her step-father has been doing his best, but her mother has driven him into the arms of a widow in the next village. Sigrid is very much on her own, and when she turns from the Shrikes, she soon learns that her schoolmates no longer like or trust her. The one possible exception is the biggest loner and schoolyard bully, Hud Doyle. As the plot advances we learn that Hud Doyle is regularly beaten by his father, that Tate's parents are religious fanatics who punish their daughter viciously, and that Mel whose mother died is insecure about her identity as a girl. Sigrid's attempts to turn away from her mean side invariably involve her in new problems. Tate and Mel are especially unforgiving of what they see as her betrayal, and physically attack her, her home, and the animals for which she has been caring. Hud comes to her rescue, and they support each other in their attempt to turn the page on their past. MacLean's setting is a perfect social microcosm. Everyone knows everyone else's business, and these children are unsentimental witnesses of the social problems of this community: alcoholism, poverty, broken marriages and domestic violence. Their voices, their actions and reactions, are honest and real. No wonder students and critics have responded so favourably to these books. Sigrid's narrative is a strong continuation of MacLean's much acclaimed work, and we can only hope more of the characters of Fiddler's Cove will come forward to tell their stories.

Thematic Links: Newfoundland; Alcoholic Parents; Domestic Abuse; Bullying; Step-Families; Friendship

Patricia Jerney

Fiction Grades 7-12

PRENDERGAST, Gabrielle

Audacious

Orca Book Publishers, 2013. 326 p. Gr. 8 - 12. 978-1-459805309. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

Having left trouble behind and looking to make a fresh start, Ella - formerly Raphaëlle - reinvents herself as she

arrives in a prairie city. But she can't make herself too plain: she is, after all, an artist. When she meets Samir, a Muslim boy, art and trouble come together again. Ella must grapple with what it means to be forbidden, to be authentic, to be audacious - even if it means losing almost everything she's come to value.

Audacious is a well-crafted verse novel. Some of the best-known books in this genre include Ellen Hopkins' *Crank* (which follows a teen girl addicted to methamphetamine) and Sonya Sones's books *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* and *One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies*, among others. (For those interested in exploring the genre, I'd also recommend Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Make Lemonade* trilogy and Martine Leavitt's stunning 2012 novel *My Book of Life by Angel*.) *Audacious* stands up well against the best representatives of the genre. The narrative is thoughtfully structured, and the verse form allows the author to engage in more word play and ambiguity than is typical in a prose novel.

I really liked *Audacious*. It's smart, funny, clever, and bold. Ella is a quirky, appealing character with a complicated back story and realistic, identifiable problems. I found it a pleasure to get to know her and to understand her art and artistry. While there are many strands to Ella's story, the main plot involves a piece of Ella's artwork. Ella creates a photo montage organized around the word *audacious* and featuring a problematic image at the centre. When her art is challenged, Ella has to make difficult decisions about her values and principles, where she is willing to compromise and where she must stay true to herself. Her decisions affect her boyfriend, her teachers, her peers, and her family as well as herself, and force her to examine issues she's run away from in the past. We see real growth in Ella, but she remains a resistant creator, not ready to make nice quite yet.

I strongly recommend *Audacious* for school and classroom libraries. It explores important, highly topical themes in an intelligent way, and never moralizes or patronizes. Some readers may need to know that the central plot involves a controversial word (and image); the "forbidden" word appears in the text several times in acrostics, for readers who might not be reading closely, but other so-called bad words appear with asterisks in them. This decision engages some of the central themes of the book itself and could lead to valuable discussions about censorship, appropriateness, and context.

Happily, this is not the end of Ella/Raphaëlle's story: the next volume, *Capricious*, has been announced. I'm looking forward to it.

Thematic Links: Art; Religion; Censorship; Freedom of Expression

Leslie Vermeer

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

ISABELLA, Jude

Chitchat: Celebrating the World's Languages

Illustrated by Kathy Boake. Kids Can Press, 2013. 44p. Illus. Gr. 5 up. 978-1-55453-787-7. Hdbk. \$17.95

Rating: G/E

Chitchat: Celebrating the World's Languages is a whimsical and interesting book that talks about all areas of language, from facts about learning to talk, how language began and why only humans can do it. The history of some words is discussed and it was interesting to find out that Dr. Seuss introduced the word 'nerd' in the 1950's! It meant a 'studious misfit', and still does today I suppose.

The author, Jude Isabelle, is a science writer based in Victoria BC and has brought to life an imaginative fact based book that will interest and help students with the history, workings, and the social mechanisms of language. The book has quizzes, a glossary and an index. In addition to an overview of world languages, the book also delves into the incredibly interesting world of languages. Did you know that some languages use directions such as east and west instead of left and right? And that some scientists think that language came from music and sing song patterns? A great resource and a good read.

Thematic Links: Languages

Katherine Watmough

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

ROBERTSON, Robbie, Jim Guerinot, Sebastian Robertson & Jared Levine

Legends, Icons & Rebels: Music That Changed the World

Tundra Books, 2013. 128p. Illus. Gr. 5 up. 978-1-77049-571-5. Includes 2 CDs. &Hdbk. Book. \$35.00

Rating: E

In this wonderful book by four veterans of the music industry, we are given a short biography of twenty-seven musical legends who changed the world of music from Louis Armstrong to Joni Mitchell and Robertson's own group, *The Band*. As Robbie Robertson states in his introduction "The artist we've chosen were the original risk-takers, extremely unique, and tremendously influential to future generations. ... Along with their biographical stories, we've included my personal reflections, remarkable facts, incredible artwork, and playlists for further listening. We've also created an exclusive *Legends, Icons & Rebels* 2-CD collection that showcases some of the extraordinary tracks laid down by these amazing musicians." (p.11)

The legends included in the collection are Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Louis Jordan, Bat King Cole, Hank Williams, Ray Charles, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash, Buddy Holly, Sam Cooke, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Patsy Cline, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, Carole King, Otis Redding, Bob Dylan, The Beach Boys, The Beatles, Bob Marley, Stevie Wonder, Joni Mitchell and The Band. As one can see from the names many different genres of music are included - rock and roll, reggae, jazz, folk, country and soul to name a few. Each biographical entry consists of a four-page spread consisting of a title page with a quote reflection from Robbie Robertson, a full-page illustration of the artist by an internationally renowned illustrator (listed in a special section at the back of the book), and a two-page text which gives a brief biographical sketch of the artist's life and musical accomplishments along with a playlist of their most popular tunes. The book also includes a timeline, information about the authors, the illustrators and the CD collection which is part of the package.

As a person who grew up in the 50s and 60s, I found this to be a fascinating summary of the music I know and love, and the music that is still remembered and loved by many of today's generation. This book would make a great gift for any music lover and would also be a great introduction to the music of the 20th century for classes studying music history at the junior high and high school level. The CDs which accompany the book featuring the original tunes by the many artists make for great listening.

Highly recommended.

Thematic Link: Music - History; Musicians

Victoria Pennell

French Resources

RUSTAD, Martha E. H.

Vive l'automne! Series: Les citrouilles: rondes et orangées (978-1-4431-2980-0); ***Les pommes: croquantes et juteuses*** (978-1-4431-2978-7); ***Les animaux: se préparent pour l'hiver***(978-1-4431-2979-4)

Illustrated by Amanda Enright. French translation by Isabelle Montagnier. Éditions Scholastic, 2013. 24p. Illus. Gr. K-3. Pbk. \$6.99 ea.

Rating: E

Les Citrouilles describes the life of a pumpkin from the beginning of the growing season to the fall when it is harvested to be eaten or used for a pumpkin lantern for Halloween. *Les Pommes* describes how an apple comes to be, from the planting of an apple seed which grows into a tree, to the pollination of the flowers on the tree, and the picking of those apples to eat. The final book in this three part series, is about the animals and their experience during autumn, and highlights the animals that migrate, hibernate and those that change their appearance. Each book has a table of contents, glossary, web resources and index. An added bonus is an extra chapter in each book which outlines an activity, whether baking pumpkin seeds, making a baked apple or experimenting with the sensation of cold water and acclimatization.

The length of these books make them a quick read and a fun introduction to the themes of autumn. The activities at the end of each book give teachers and parents an obvious bonus extension activity to explore, however, these books provide many opportunities for further research into the elements of each topic. They are a fun and engaging introduction to fall.

Thematic Links: Pumpkins; Apples; Animals; Fall; Growing Seasons; Migration; Hibernation; Camouflage; Seasons; Celebrations

Elizabeth Ford