

### Picture Books

POULIN, Andree.

#### ***Pablo Finds a Treasure***

Illustrated by Isabelle Melenfant. Annick Press, 2016. 32p. Illus. Gr. K-5. 978-1-55451-866-1. Pbk. \$11.95

RATING: E

Pablo and his sister Sophia head to “Treasure Mountain” on a daily basis, hoping to find food and other treasures that their mother could sell to provide the family with necessities they can use. They are only two of the children who do this task on a daily basis. The “mountain” is really a dump, where filth and squalor abound, but once the children settle into their daily task, then seem to forget the stench and filth that hides the treasures.

Sofia is more focussed on food as a treasure while Pablo wants to find things his mother can sell. Pablo gets really excited about finding books more than any other treasure, but he is unable to read them. There is one major problem that exists at the mountain during this daily treasure finding; the problem that haunts Treasure Mountain is a bully by the name of Filthy Face, a name given him by the children. This notorious bully hovers over the mountain, waiting for the children to find something good of value that he can steal. One day Pablo discovers a gold chain hidden about the garbage. But Pablo now worries that Filthy Face will discover it and he will be forced to give up his find.

***Pablo Finds a Treasure*** is a simply written story but complemented with stark yet impressive charcoal illustrations. Most of the illustrations display no colour, except when certain aspects in the story are enhanced with colour details, such as a red book Pablo finds, the gold chain, or the food the children dream of having. The illustrator’s choices are perfect for the text, which is done in easily readable sentences, in words a child would express.

***Pablo Finds a Treasure*** demonstrates the reality facing many children around the world who live in poverty and must scour for food in places of garbage and decay. A wonderful book that will certainly spark discussions of social justice issues that children deal with everyday. It is gentle in its delivery of the topic of poverty, and does shed some hope that these children are happy and accepting of the plight they are given.

***Thematic Links:*** Bullies; Poverty; Homelessness; Relationships; Survival

Carmelita Cechetto-Shea

### Fiction Grades 3-6

PEARSON, Kit

#### ***A Day of Signs and Wonders***

HarperCollinsCanada, 2016. 203p. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-44344-399-9. Pbk. \$14.99

Rating: E

***A Day of Signs and Wonders*** imagines a meeting between two Victorian daughters: Kitty, who grew up to be Kathleen O’Reilly, best remembered today for her home, the Point Ellice House historical site; and Emily, who grew up to be Emily Carr, one of Canada’s most identifiable painters. On the day of their fictional meeting in 1881, Kitty is a sad thirteen-year-old, devastated by the loss of her younger sister. Nine-year-old Emily runs into Kitty while Emily is making an early-morning escape from her crabby guardian. The juxtaposition of Emily’s energy against Kitty’s reserve produces a beautiful play of contrasts in a complex, richly woven text that will appeal to anyone who enjoys historical fiction.

From the first moment readers meet Emily, she is portrayed as earthy and unconventional. This passage, from the

third page of the book, captures both the author's style and one of the book's key themes:

*A spider's web stretched from the gatepost to a lavender bush. The droplets on its fragile strands made a perfect pattern of shimmering beads. The day was brand new, like a piece of clean paper waiting for someone to draw on. Despite the bright sun the air was chilly, but Emily didn't care. She had escaped!*

*She began stamping along the road, her feet raising clouds of dust. She wasn't wearing shoes, a hat, or her petticoat ... she wasn't even wearing undergarments! ...*

*I'm free! gloated Emily. Free of stern Mrs. Crane, free of failing miserably to behave.*

Emily despises the restrictive clothing she wears as a young girl, particularly her pinafore (which becomes an element of the plot). She also enjoys food and responds strongly to beauty and sensuousness. She feels her emotions unreservedly and speaks her mind freely - indeed much too freely for the uptight Mrs Crane, who is watching Emily and her sister Alice while their mother recovers from a serious illness.

Kitty, on the other hand, reads as dreamy and ethereal, but is desperately sad. Yet something about Emily's wildness appeals to Kitty, and she invites Emily to spend the day with her. Kitty has largely internalized her lot as a Victorian female, but she's struggling: with the loss of her sister, with her own imminent departure for boarding school, and especially with a future that will pull her away from the home she loves. As the girls play and get to know each other, they reveal more about themselves and their fears, creating a gently literary experience for young readers and offering moments for readerly reflection and insight.

*A Day of Signs and Wonders* is an accomplished book by a talented author. It should be a high-priority acquisition for school and public libraries, and will make an excellent addition to classroom libraries. It could easily be taught as a novel study, or used as an independent novel with a strong upper-elementary reader, particularly one who is ready to leap beyond the *Little House Series* and into *Anne of Green Gables* or similar books. The novel will stand up well to re-reading, and its layers of imagery and patterning will reward the attentive reader.

It is also, incidentally, a physically lovely book; the cover is delicate, almost airy, and the French flaps evoke an older style of publishing, a book that is special, even precious (although some boys may not respond well to it). The map at the front of the book is a great artifact for readers who have visited present-day Victoria. They can try to map their own visit on Emily's Victoria; key landmarks will help with orientation.

*A Day of Signs and Wonders* is one of my favourite middlegrade books of 2016. I strongly recommend it.

**Thematic Links:** Emily Carr; Art; Victoria, British Columbia; Sisters; Historical Fiction; Historical Figures

Leslie Vermeer

## **Fiction Grades 7-12**

SCARROW, Kristine

***If This Is Home***

Dundurn Press, 2017. 184p. Gr. 5 up. 978-1-4597-3650-4. Pbk. \$12.99

Rating: E

While *If This Is Home* falls squarely into that sub-category of YA Fiction called "Sicklit", it also rises above all the usual trauma and emotion of the genre to present a story that is realistic in the best possible way, avoiding the potential awfulness of most "cancer" books. This is not to trivialize the situation that 15-year-old Jayce Loewen finds herself in when her single parent mother is diagnosed with stage 4 terminal cancer, and she becomes the chief caregiver for her four-year-old sister, Ellie.

Jayce is faced with a lot of difficult decisions regarding the path forward. One that she makes is to track down her long absent father who is unaware of the fact that Ellie exists. Jayce is also coping with school and friend issues along with lack of money and the reality of what will eventually happen to her mother. When she meets Kurt another teenager who has also faced big difficulties, a friendship ensues and she gains more resolve.

What makes this story a winner is Jayce's attitude and determination to do the right thing. Both Jayce and Kurt are portrayed as strong young people who can make good decisions. Like so many times in life, sometimes those

decisions are compromises.

Scarrow demonstrates in this book that pragmatism can be a very positive position and that people can and do rise to the occasion despite previous missteps and imperfections. Jayce's life is the consequence of adults in her life doing some unfortunate things in the past, but the author wisely chooses not to define those people as totally terrible or evil, and she suggests that redemption in some form or other is always possible.

Beyond strong characterization, the Saskatchewan setting of the books feels totally authentic and contemporary. The writing is clean and direct, and the reader will remember Jayce and her family.

**Thematic Links:** Cancer; Coming-of-age

Anne Letain

### **Non-Fiction Preschool - Grade 6**

SKRYPUCH, Marsha Forchuk & Tuan Ho

***Adrift At Sea: A Vietnamese Boy's Story of Survival***

Illustrated by Brian Deines. Pajama Press, 2016. Unp. Illus. Gr. K-6. 978-1-77278-005-5. Hdbk. \$22.95

Rating: E

What a powerful book! Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch and Tuan Ho tell the story of Tuan and his family's escape from Vietnam in an overcrowded fishing boat in 1981. The story is a true one recounted by Tuan of how he (when he was six years old), his mother, his two sisters and his aunt and cousins made their escape from their home in the middle of the night, avoiding the bullets of the military police as they boarded small boats which took them out to a larger boat which was to take them to freedom. Tuan describes the overcrowded conditions on the boat with the hot sun pouring down on them and very little food and water. On the second day the boat started leaking and then on the third day the motor broke down - the boat was now adrift. On the sixth day the refugees were rescued by an American aircraft carrier which took them to a refugee camp on Bidong Island of the coast of Malaysia. After two and a half months they were moved to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and three months later they joined their father and older sister in Saskatoon. The remainder of their family made their way to Canada by 1985.

Brian Deines subtle double page oil paintings add greatly to the mood and text of this story. There is also an historical and biographical section at the end of the book which explains the conditions in Vietnam in 1981 and what happened to Tuan Ho's family as they made a new life for themselves in Canada. Tuan has become a very successful physiotherapist and now has a family of his own.

This book is very timely as we have so many refugees from war torn countries in the Middle East now attempting to make their way to a better life under the same kind of condition that the Vietnamese people experienced back in 1981. With so many refugees children attending schools in Canada now, books like this one can help young children appreciate what some of these children have experienced and develop an empathy for them as they integrate into Canadian society.

I would highly recommend this book for all school and public libraries.

**Thematic Link:** Vietnamese Refugees

Victoria Pennell

### **Non-Fiction Grades 7-12**

HYDE, Natalie.

***Stay Silent: A Refugee's Escape from Columbia (Arrivals Series)***

Clockwise Press, 2016. 143p. Illus. Gr. 6-8. 978-0-9939351-9-0. Pbk. \$12.95

RATING: G/E

***Stay Silent: A Refugee's Escape from Columbia*** is the second title in the *Arrivals Series* by Clockwise Press. The *Arrivals Series* is a narrative non-fiction series portraying the life stories of amazing immigrants and refugees from around the world who have come to Canada to seek a better life for themselves and their families; they often contribute successfully to the growth and well-being of the community they eventually call their new home. Growing up in Columbia was not easy for Paola; her childhood consisted of living in an abusive home with her mother and father. The mother tolerated the abuse and often condoned it as well. Paola's escape or safe haven from the abuse was the home of her grandmother. Often children who live in this environment grow up fast, as is the case with Paola Gomez. Paola used her intelligence and determination to rise above the abuse and her dismal childhood. Paola quickly rose to success despite the abuse and decided she wanted to help women who were also suffering in abusive spaces. Dedicating her life and work to provide safe havens and shelters for women and children in crisis, Paola soon learned that being "silent" was what the authorities expected and desired. Not being "silent" could lead to many repercussions from those in charge, often resulting in death or a "disappearance". With the murder of a street child named Wilfred, Paola's action of standing up to the murderers placed her in danger which led to deaths threats and fear. "Staying silent" was not something Paola believed in, but one night, after being brutally attacked she decided she had no alternative but to leave Columbia.

***Stay Silent: A Refugee's Escape from Columbia*** is an example of a book that covers and explains the topic of corruption and abuse in the country of Columbia. The author doesn't use too graphic or horrific descriptions to explain Paola's plight, but the author doesn't make the story a flowery example of the struggle in Columbia and of Paola's escape to freedom.

There are a multitude of "extras" included in the book to help the reader understand the story. An author's note, a forward (by Paola), and a prologue are found at the beginning of the book. Thirteen chapters follow. There is a timeline, a resources list, a section on how kids can help, an acknowledgements page, and an index. The illustrations consist of two pages of photos (p.77-78) immersed in the middle of the book. All additions provide more information for the reader in helping understand the story of Paola and her life in Columbia and her escape to Canada.

***Stay Silent: A Refugees' Escape from Columbia*** is an excellent book for classroom discussions in regards to social justice topics. It is well written, not overly complicated in its delivery and message, and will interest many who want to learn more about refugees from a narrative non-fiction book instead of an information non-fiction book. Often this type of story will keep readers engaged longer in understanding the character's life.

***Thematic Links:*** Refugees; Women's Rights; Columbia; Social Justice; Overcoming Diversity

Carmelita Cechetto-Shea

### **Audio-Visual Materials**

#### ***Malala: The Power of One Voice***

McInyre Media. 2015. DVD. 15 min. Includes Teacher Resource Guide. Gr. 6-12. \$129.00

Rating: E

***Malala: The Power of One Voice*** tells the story of one young girl who had the courage to stand up for her rights to an education in a society where girls are traditionally denied education. She has spoken to multitudes of audiences about her trials and successes. She is an exemplary activist for women's rights.

Malala Yousafzai won a Nobel Peace Prize for her dedication to educate the world about the plight of girls who are being denied an education in their countries. She is the youngest person to achieve such a stellar accomplishment. This riveting and inspiring documentary is an excellent tool for use in Canadian Social Studies, Character Education, Gender and Women's Rights, Political Activism, and Social Issues. It demonstrates the importance of Education for all and the positive effect education has on issues such as child labour, child marriage, sexual assault, poverty and a wealth of other gender issues.

The Teacher Resource Guide provides a variety of discussion topics, student activities as well as an additional Resource list for further study. Highly recommended for school collections, public libraries and classrooms.

**Thematic Links:** Malala Yousafzai; Women - Education; Nobel Peace Prize

Sharon Armstrong

### **Professional Materials**

BOOTH, David

***Literacy 101: Questions and Answers That Meet the Needs of Real Teachers in K-8 Classrooms***  
Pembroke Publishers, 2016. 122 p. 978-1-55138-315-6. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

David Booth is Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where he teaches graduate courses on innovative ways to promote literacy development with students. He has won numerous awards for his writing and his achievements in the world of education. His newest book, ***Literacy 101***, is an expansive survey which answers real questions from teachers about how to turn literacy research and theory into effective practice. Booth tells readers in his introduction, *“I have tried to share my understanding of the current teachings in literacy and their implications for how children become readers and writers of different types of texts”*. (p. 8)

This book is divided into seven chapters. Each chapter explores a particular aspect of literacy development: exploring the meaning of the term “literacy,” teaching students to read, responding to text, organizing an effective reading program, defining the parameters of writing in various subject areas, developing a literacy community, and using tests to teach literacy.

The very first chapter, *“Why is ‘literacy’ such a popular term in teaching today?”* explores the current research on literacy education. Booth describes the changes that have occurred over the years in teaching students to read and write. *“Literacy was once defined simply as the ability to read and write. Today we understand that there are multiple literacies: we recognize the variety of ways to make shared meaning in our lives - language... music, art , graphics, technology, dance, and, in fact, all the symbol systems.”* (p. 10) Subsequent chapters give readers insight into various aspects of literacy instruction with specific classroom strategies gained by years of experience with young readers as well as insights into current research and strategies proposed by experts in literacy education. The author has provided readers with helpful strategies to improve the literacy skills of students of all ages. This book would be a wonderful introduction to literacy education for teacher candidates. It would also be useful to teachers who want to engage in a discussion about effective literacy practices. Booth urges all teachers to create a “literacy community” in their classrooms. *“The students in your class will each reveal divergent interest, abilities, cultures, and family backgrounds, but you can try to build a classroom community that encourages a cooperative and respectful atmosphere for all members. Literacy offers an opportunity for achieving these goals.”* (p. 96)

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

Myra Junyk

### **French Resources**

ROY, Isabelle

***Hackers***

Les Éditions Hurtubise, 2016. 231p. Gr. 7-9. 978-2-89723-853-3. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

Alex is a computer hacker, a genius when it comes to infiltrating the networks of major organizations, undetected. That is, until Alex is caught in the act by a hacker rival and must call on his father David, fellow technology expert,

to help him. David's plan to help his son goes wrong and now, as both father and son risk detection, David takes the fall for Alex. Alex must work with his closest friend Camille to find his father and learn more about a clandestine network of hackers known only as *ADNchaos*. The situation is further complicated as Alex, motivated by his new friendship with the beautiful Ariane, is called on to use his hacking skills to help another new friend, Calvin. As Alex is pulled deeper into Calvin's dangerous hacking plot, one question remains: Will Alex ever be reunited with his father?

In this timely and suspenseful techno-thriller, Roy creates a story that will appeal to both male and female readers at the intermediate level. In creating a strong, yet-flawed, male protagonist, Roy addresses the common problem of reaching young male readers and by also injecting the story with smart, confident female characters and a hint of romance, the novel is very accessible and has a broad appeal. Readers in intermediate grades will find this novel relatable and timely and, while the conclusion would benefit from further development of the plotline surrounding Alex's father, this novel is highly recommended for intermediate French classrooms and libraries.

***Thematic Links:*** Mystery and Thriller; Technology; Friendship; Romance; Secrets and Deception; Identity; Family

Amy J Flight, French Immersion Teacher, Mount Pearl Senior High