

**Picture Books**

FLORENCE Melanie

***Stolen Words***

Illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard. Second Story Press, 2017. 24p. Illus. Gr. K-2. 978-1-77260-037-7. Hdbk. \$17.95

RATING: E

A little girl asks her grandfather to teach her something in his Cree language. When he says he can't, she asks for a reason why. She now begins a mission; to help her grandfather find his Cree language again. So begins the narrative ***Stolen Words***, an unforgettable picture book recounting a child's experience in a residential school.

Throughout the dialogue between the child and the adult, there are no references to either having a name; this anonymity signifies the inclusiveness of so many children who had to deal with the legacy and tragedy of residential schools. Remaining nameless reflects it could be anyone.

***Stolen Words*** reflects the impact that many Indigenous children faced when taken from their families and placed in a school system that was determined to eliminate their culture, their heritage, and ultimately their dignity. This gentle story describes the pain and fear faced by so many Canadian Indigenous children from various First Nations communities across the country. But through all the pain, which often gets passed on through the generations, healing is possible. The simple text in ***Stolen Words*** has a powerful impact emotionally on the reader, but also inspires hope and courage as the child and adult embark on a journey of healing, through love, determination, and resiliency. Florence uses gentle words to comfort the harshness of the topic of the residential school experience. Residential school existence is a period in Canadian history that often remained silent, as survivors felt ashamed to speak of their experiences. With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report in 2015, society is slowly discovering the significance and need for understanding the long-term effects indigenous families of survivors are dealt. Systemic racism was the root of the pain. ***Stolen Words*** is glorious picture book that tells a powerful story which needs to be recalled by readers of all ages. It is also a love story, between a child and her grandfather; a love between the two that exists and helps with healing, and ultimately the power to be freed from the past. This darkness in Canadian history is just being recognized for the indignity that it was, and the need for society to erase racism from the dictionary; ***Stolen Words*** is a very compelling tool needed for that eradication.

Besides the gentleness of the text, the illustrations are meaningful, reflective of the pain. Subtle colours and expressions enhance the text, with bright and colourful images reflecting the present day "story" of the child and grandfather, while images of the time during the grandfather's residence in the residential schools can be seen in muted, colourless pictures. This contrast is gentle and highly effective in the telling of the story. The image of the children singing with the adult holding a cage as a bird seems to be flying into the cage is very symbolic in the concept of locking the voices away, stopping each child from flying on their own as free and unique people; the colour on the double page illustration is dark, colourless and a stark vision of the reality faced by the children. Near the end of the story, birds can be seen flying with "word" tails in the air; the stolen words receiving their freedom as the grandfather opens the pages of the book *An Introduction to Cree*. Scattered Cree words enhance several pages in the story as well. The final page portrays the child and adult walking away, hand in hand, with a bird flying freely in the sky. These mixed media illustrations truly complement the story perfectly with a sensitivity and gentleness essential for a story of such a horrific topic.

***Stolen Words*** is not just for Indigenous children in Canada, it is a book for all cultures. Although written for children from ages 4-8, ***Stolen Words*** is a book that should be read by both children and adults of all ages for its historical significance, emotional text, and artistic portrayal suffered by so many. It makes the reader reflect on the importance of culture, family, and one's own identity, not just for indigenous people, but also for people of all cultures. And with seeing this story through the eyes of a child, ***Stolen Words*** is highly effective as a powerful and dynamic narrative. It reminds us, that hope is real! ***Stolen Words*** is an excellent book that should be found in all school libraries, as well as public libraries and high school course classrooms.

***Thematic Links:*** Residential Schools; Cree Language; Courage; Love; Healing

Carmelita Cechetto-Shea

### **Fiction Grades 3-6**

LEACH, Sara

#### ***Slug Days***

Pajama Press, 2017. 117p. Gr.1-5. 978-1-77278-022-2. Hdbk. \$17.95

Rating: E

Lauren has Autism Spectrum Disorder and experiences the world in her own way - a way that is not always compatible with the people around her or appropriate for the setting. She has tremendous support in the classroom and from her parents, and she regularly reaches for strategies to keep the slug days away, but sometimes a slug day happens anyway. How will Lauren turn slug days into butterfly days? Maybe a good friend is what she needs. *Slug Days* is a sensitive, playful, lovingly told chapter book about school, friends, and days both good and bad, drawn from author Sara Leach's real-life experiences in classrooms. Lauren is charming and frustrating; many readers will recognize her pattern of taking two steps forward and - sometimes - two steps back. Dan, Lauren's persistent frenemy, is equally recognizable, and the big and small moments of Dan and Lauren's dynamic are insightfully captured in both prose and illustration.

Although it's written for readers making the transition to independent reading, *Slug Days* would make an outstanding read-aloud book for early elementary classrooms, particularly in schools where anti-bullying policies and programs aimed at fostering empathy and respect for others are priorities. This sweet, gentle book is rich with *Aha!* moments for everyone - including teachers. Readers may be familiar with the character of Sheldon, the super-intelligent centre of TV's *Big Bang Theory*. *Slug Days* provides a more nuanced representation of a young person identified as neuro-atypical. (Older readers intrigued by Lauren's story may enjoy Darren Groth's 2015 YA novel *Are You Seeing Me?*, which also features a character on the autism spectrum. Both books encourage greater inclusivity and understanding of individual differences.)

Whether she's making homes for insects, visiting her favourite tree, or playing with her baby sister, Lauren is a lovable character at the centre of a relevant story. I hope *Slug Days* reaches a wide audience of parents, teachers, librarians, and kids: it's a winner.

***Thematic Links:*** Emotions; School; Friendship; Insects; Autism Spectrum Disorder; What makes us Different?

Leslie Vermeer

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

GOLD, Jennifer

#### ***On the Spectrum***

Second Story Press, 2017. 319p. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-77260-042-1. Pbk. \$13.95

Rating: E

Clara and her half-brother Alastair are both on the spectrum: he is on the spectrum of autism, and she is on the spectrum of eating disorders. Her professional ballerina mother has always been concerned with her weight, and correlates healthy with thin. As a result, both Clara and her mother have developed obsessions about caloric and nutritional content, and their diet is almost exclusively sushi and Perrier. When the school counsellor suggests that they need professional help, they are in denial.

Then Clara gets the invitation to spend the summer with her father, his new wife, and their six-year-old son Alastair at their home in Paris. Clara knows her brother has autism, but doesn't realize what a special little boy he is until she gets to know him better. He has challenges with crowds and over-stimulation, but he is very clever and refreshingly honest. In return, she helps him to better understand social norms, and helps his parents to address the bullying which has been happening. But Paris is also a food culture, and the handsome son of the downstairs bakery owner

encourages Clara to appreciate the pleasures of food. Only when she learns her mother has broken her hip due to osteoporosis does Clara admit the extent of their “*folie à deux*”. They are both ready to seek help. In her acknowledgements, the author explains: “*I wanted to convey to readers that girls with eating disorders aren’t all anorexic or bulimic - that disordered eating and body image disorders exist on spectrum - and to show that being on the autism spectrum is not a curse of some kind.*” (p. 321) This novel addresses the role of peer pressure and of social media in a clear and authentic manner, with charming characters. After all, who isn’t “*on the spectrum*” in some aspect of their life?

**Thematic Links:** Autism; Eating Disorders; Orthorexia; Relationships to Food; Paris; Romance

Patricia Jerney

### **Non-Fiction Grade K-6**

RUURS, Margriet

***The Elephant Keeper: Caring for Orphaned Elephants in Zambia. (CitizenKids Series)***

Illustrated by Pedro Covo. Kids Can Press. 2017. 48p. Illus. Gr. 3-7. 978-1-77138-561-9. Hdbk. \$19.99

Rating: E

A visit to the Lilayi Elephant Nursery in Zambia inspired Margriet Ruurs to write ***The Elephant Keeper***. A portion of the sales of this book is donated to the Elephant Orphanage Project. The book is from the CitizenKid Series, “*A collection of books that inform children about the world and inspire them to be better global citizens.*” Margriet tells the story of a friendship between a teenaged boy Aaron and a baby elephant Zambezi. One day, despite his fear of elephants, Aaron saves Zambezi from drowning. This action prompts Aaron to empathize with the orphaned elephant and to question what he know about elephants. The baby is transferred to an elephant orphanage where Aaron visits Zambezi and successfully nurses him. Because of his care and skill Aaron becomes an elephant keeper at the orphanage. “*One of the things he loves most about his job is speaking to children about the importance of wildlife preservation and, he hopes, helping to bring an end to poaching.*”

The story is told skilfully evoking interest and compassion. The accompanying artwork by Pedro Covo is so vivid the reader can almost taste the dust and feel the heat of Zambia. Augmenting the story are three two-page non-fiction spreads of information about elephants, the dangers of poaching and habitat destruction. Readers are introduced to the real life Aaron and Zambezi. The book concludes with a “How you can help” section and Glossary.

***The Elephant Keeper*** is highly recommended for both public and school libraries. The book is an excellent read-aloud story. The book can be perused individually or within a classroom setting covering a wide range of topics from animal conservation, environmental stewardship to compassion and understanding. As with any picture book containing great art, the illustrations can be used as a basis for exploring creativity and expression through art.

**Thematic Links:** Elephants; Elephant Orphanages; Poaching; Zambia

Laura Reilly

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

GRAY SMITH, Monique

***Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation***

Orca Book Publishers, 2017. 140p. Gr. 4-8. 978-1-4598-1538-4. Hdbk. \$29.95 (Reviewed from Advance Reading Copy)

Rating: E

***Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation*** is a vibrant non-fiction resource for middle grade students. Monique Gray Smith challenges all readers to take a journey with her. She begins with outlining the historical context and events that have precipitated the need for understanding and reconciliation. From first contact to the era of treaties to residential schools, Gray Smith explores the events that have scarred relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Gray Smith also includes a current examination of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Committee) process and the resulting calls to action.

One of her central questions is, what can all of us do now to move forward? Reciprocity, building bridges, talking and teaching about the legacy of residential schools, becoming and/or acting as an ally, watching and discussing *94 Days for Reconciliation* found on YouTube, are only some of the suggestions that Gray Smith presents. “*One thing I know for sure is that there is always an answer. And it is never “Nothing.” There is always something we can do*” (p. 125).

All of the information in this book is clearly organized and supported by meaningful graphics and pictures. The text is easy to follow and divided into manageable chunks with glossary definitions as needed. This book is easily one of the most current and thoughtful that I have read on the subject. Every school library should consider adding this book to their collection.

***Thematic Links:*** Aboriginal Concerns and Issues; Residential Schools; Canadian History as it Impacts Indigenous Peoples; Truth and Reconciliation; Self-Reflection; Calls to Action; Self-Discovery

Angela Thompson

### **Professional Materials**

CAMPBELL, Terry Anne and Michelle E. McMartin.

***Literacy Out Loud - Creating Vibrant Classrooms Where “Talk” is the Springboard for all Learning***  
Pembroke Publishers, 2017. 128p. 978-1-55138-323-1. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

***Literacy Out Loud*** is an excellent guide to using oral language in the classroom. It explains the reasons why classroom talk matters while giving teachers a myriad of tools to help them develop a vibrant learning community in their classrooms. “*To flourish as learners and as human beings, we need to be articulate oral communicators. Teachers can cultivate this ability in students through vibrant classroom talk.*” (p. 5)

The first three chapters of ***Literacy Out Loud*** (LOL) deal with the mechanics of using oral language in the classroom. Chapter 1, “Using Oral Language to Create Community,” explains that speaking and listening are core pillars of community life. Teachers may hesitate to promote oral language in their classrooms for fear of losing control by letting students talk. They also wonder how to be accountable and how to channel the energy of over-exuberant talkers in their classrooms. Campbell and McMartin provide several effective organizing tools deal with these issues and create community through oral language such as: community circle, talking sticks, and story sharing. In the next two chapters, the writers examine key aspects of oral language instruction including: assessment, discussion strategies, small-group discussion, whole-group sharing and sketch to stretch.

In the subsequent six chapters, Campbell and McMartin focus in on specific kinds of oral language such as: poetry, read-alouds, drama, storytelling, talk circles and readers theatre. Each chapter provides readers with an overview of the topic with text suggestions at various grade levels as well as effective strategies to use with students. Assessment and accommodations are addressed throughout. One particularly enlightening section in “Optimizing the Impact of Read-Alouds” (Chapter 5) examines the question, “Why Use Potentially Controversial Texts in the Classroom?” In today’s world of fake news and difficult conversations, including controversial texts gives students the possibility to talk critically about challenging ideas and important issues in their world such as: bullying, safety, human rights, social justice, hunger, and homelessness.

The practical and motivating activities in this book could be used by both new and experienced teachers who wish to promote the oral language skills of their students. The essence of this excellent guide is summed up in Michelle McMartin’s own words, “*The whole purpose of the LOL classroom is to make students collaborators in charge of their own learning. I know that we can never underestimate our students.*” (p. 117)

***Thematic Links:*** Oral Language; Classroom Community; Talk Strategies; Poetry; Read-Alouds; Drama;

Storytelling; Readers Theatre

Myra Junyk

**French Materials**

LATULIPPE, Martine

***La naissance du capteur de rêves***

Illustrated by Brandy Woods. Éditions Auzou, 2017. 25p. Illus. Gr. 2-5. 978-2-7338-4766-4. Pbk. \$4.95

Rating: G

***La naissance du capteur des rêves*** tells the legend of how dream catchers came to be an important symbol in indigenous culture. Isah is a young Ojibwe hunter, and one day while in the forest he comes across a small fire. As he approaches, he sees an elder crouched by the fire with strange symbols in the soil at his feet. Isah asks him what they mean, and the elder explains the symbols hold magical powers and soon he will be the leader of all the world because of them. Anyone who tries to stop him will be cursed with an evil spell. Isah is troubled by the elder's words, and the next day he returns to find the old man sleeping next to the fire. Isah takes the opportunity to erase the symbols in the earth. He returns to his village without any food, but with a clear conscience. That night, Isah has a terrible nightmare that a beast with red eyes and sharp teeth has come to attack his true love. Isah is unable to sleep for days afterwards, and still hasn't caught any food for his people. One night, he sees a grandmother spider who tells him she knows how to rid him from the curse. She instructs him to go into the forest to find the branch of an ash tree and bend it into a circle, and then bring it back to her. Isah does what the grandmother spider told him to, and when he shows her the tree branch, she spins a thick web inside it. She adds some feathers and beads, and tells Isah to hang it above his bed and it will catch the bad dreams that come at night. Isah sleeps well for the first time in a long time, and the next day he has a successful hunt to feed his village. Isah shows his dream catcher to the other villagers, and soon every wigwam has a dream catcher in it to keep the bad spirits away.

A nice story for children about First Nations culture, this book tells the legend of the dream catcher. The story is well written at a few lines per page, with appropriate vocabulary for the intended age group. The text is accompanied by lovely and captivating illustrations depicting the events. This book could be used as part of the First Nation component in the curriculum, and offer discussions about the choice Isah made and how they relate to choices we make in our lives. Recommended for primary/elementary classroom or school libraries.

***Thematic Links:*** First Nations Culture; Indigenous People; Legends

Veronique Lavoie