

Resource Links Excerpts  
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**Picture Books**

GOLDSTYN, Jacques

***The Eleventh Hour***

OwlKids Books, 2018. Unp. Illus. Gr. 2 up. 978-1-77147-348-4. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

Two Canadian friends, Jim and Jules, one born just two minutes after the other, enlist the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Great War (1914-1918), imagining that their adventure will be full of epic battles and reflected glory. What the two discover is anything but, as they end up in the trenches fighting together although Jim is a natural leader and is always about two minutes ahead of Jules, which means that only one of them will see the Armistice begin on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918.

In a style reminiscent of the great Quentin Blake, Jacques Goldstyn's wonderfully inventive and amusing cartoons create an eloquent and compact story of war that can be appreciated by anyone from seven to seventy plus.

This is a story of enduring friendship set against a horrendous backdrop. Jim seems to garner all the military attention and Jules is always left behind with the leftovers - the uniform that doesn't fit, chores in the trenches. One gets the medals, the other peels potatoes.

While the illustrations are both charming and funny, as they proceed, they become darker and darker arcing across the pages with more and more explosive violence and depictions of the reality of war both in the trenches and at home.

There will be lots to talk about after sharing this very fine picture book; highly recommended especially for elementary school library collections.

***Thematic Links:*** Remembrance Day; World War I;

Anne Letain

**Fiction Grades 3-6**

KORMAN, Gordon

***WhatsHisFace***

Scholastic Press, 2018. 231p. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-338-20016-4. Hdbk. \$21.99

Rating: E

Cooper Vega's military family has moved again! This time, he is a new student at Stratford Middle School where no one cares about him - and no one knows his name. "*Cooper Vega is invisible.*" (p. 1) His fellow students soon start calling him WhatsHisFace. Stratford is a unique town. Its original name was Three Hills, but when super-wealthy Somerset Wolfson moved to town, he forced the town to change its name to Stratford after William Shakespeare's hometown in England. Wolfson has a unique private collection of Shakespeare's memorabilia.

Cooper is hopeless at navigating the social and emotional world of middle school, but his crush on fellow student Jolie Soloman causes him to volunteer to be part of the cast of the yearly Shakespeare production of *Romeo and Juliet*. In order to compensate for yet another move, his parents have given him a brand new state of the art smartphone - the GX-4000. However, from the first moment there are problems. Whenever he tries to use it, there are strange sounds. Then something very strange happens. The phone starts speaking to him in the voice of Roderick Barnabas Northrop, a printer's apprentice from the time of Shakespeare. At first, the two just have conversations, but soon Roderick is able to appear as a shadowy presence. Does Roderick have some relationship to Shakespeare? Could he have written *Romeo and Juliet*? What role will Cooper play in revealing the truth about one of

Shakespeare's greatest plays to the town of Stratford?

Gordon Korman has written an amusing novel about a reluctant hero who learns a great deal about Elizabethan England, the history of Shakespeare's plays, as well as the supernatural. Korman uses the smartphone as a core focus of his narrative. The phone is an important part of Cooper's life, as it is in the lives of most teenagers. However, Cooper has the added stress of having a historical being in his phone, related in some strange way to Shakespeare. Readers will definitely enjoy exploring the importance of smartphone communication, as well as learning about Shakespeare and his plays. Supernatural elements, young love, and a bit of larceny make *WhatsHisFace* an exciting read which will keep both male and female readers engaged.

**Thematic Links:** Loneliness; Friendship; Young Love; Smartphones; Elizabethan England; Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; Plagiarism; Drama Productions; Supernatural

Myra Junyk

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

TRAN-DAVIES, Nhung N.

#### ***A Grain of Rice***

Tradewind Books, 2018. 168p. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-926890-25-8. Pbk. \$12.95

Rating: G

In her book *A Grain of Rice*, Nhung N. Tran-Davies depicts the severe hardship that a family must endure in order to escape a war torn Vietnam. The family is comprised of just a mother and three young children. Their plan after a flood destroys their home is to somehow gather a few resources in order to board a boat out of the country. But achieving this goal will require certain exposure to the dangers of the oppressive Viet Cong and all manner of desperate people just trying to survive.

The family becomes embroiled in the most dire situations, navigating the Vietnamese landscape with a severe lack of vital resources such as food and money. It therefore becomes crucial that they work together in order to gain safe passage. The book is narrated by one of the three children named Yen, an introspective thirteen year old girl. Yen's unique perspective gives the reader an excellent sense of the danger, given that she remains somewhat innocent yet stands headlong on the verge of adulthood. The terrible scenes that unfold because of war become evermore pronounced as she miscalculates a lot of what she encounters but learns to adapt and survive. Her evolution as a character is hastened due to the carnage and adult situations she is thrown into and the strength and maturity she exhibits is an important message for any young reader.

Tran-Davies makes it very clear that war is hell without getting into too much of the gory detail. There is a foreboding sense of doom that surrounds all the characters, as the family goes into villages where their relatives and friends are affected by the war in different ways. Some of the people they meet will sacrifice their resources to help the family while others will attempt to rob them or hurt them just to gain an advantage. A good-versus-evil dichotomy therefore develops, and through it all the small acts of kindness that Yen's family continually extend is what will save them from catastrophe.

**Thematic Links:** Vietnam; Village Life; Asia; Rice Agriculture & Farming; People Smuggling

Zachary Chauvin

### **Non-Fiction Grades K-6**

MORGAN, Bernice

#### ***Seasons Before the War***

Illustrated by Brita Gannström. Running the Goat, Books and BroadSides, 2018. Unp. Illus. Gr. 2 up. 978-1-92791718-3. Hdbk. \$29.95

Rating: E

Originally commissioned by the Shalloway Youth Choir of Newfoundland and Labrador for a reading at a Christmas concert, Bernice Morgan has now turned this piece into a beautiful picture book to be enjoyed by all ages. Morgan divides her memories of growing up in St. John's, Newfoundland in the era between the two World Wars into the four seasons and the kinds of activities each time of the year brought with it.

In the section on spring she talks about the children playing in the many fields and open spaces near her home - "*the boys played ball and rolled hoops; we girls played hop-scotch and skipping and house ... but more often boys and girls played together; games of "Hoist your sials and run, complicated games of marbles.... circling and circling to "London Bridge". "Ring around the rosy", "King William was King George's Son" or "Ashoo! Ashoo! All fall down" - ancient chants that has seeped down to us from a time beyond memory*" She also talks about family conversations around the supper table and how her father always worried about having enough money to support his family. In summer she relates tales of playing in Bannerman Park, the farmers delivering their produce, the various stores in the neighbourhood, the blacksmith and carpenter shops and the dump where they were always looking for some kind of treasure (they never found much!). In the section on fall, Morgan talks about when she started school with her "Caribou exercise book, a ruler, two beautiful striped pencils, and a book bag like my brothers'" School. however, turned out to be a disappointment when she found out she was "not the smartest or the prettiest child in the world" and "the only child in kindergarten wearing glasses". In the section on winter she talks about the kinds of things they did around the house and the big night in December when the whole family visited "Toyland" in the various department stories which lined downtown Water Street.

Even though I was a post World War II baby boomer, I can relate to most of what Morgan has portrayed of her childhood. As I read I was brought back to my own childhood and even though I did not live in the city, I did live quite close and made many trips back and forth. Morgan has given a very realistic portrait of what life was like at that time, before World War II brought an influx of people and industry into St. John's and it took on more of the attributes of a larger city. Brita Gannström's muted colour illustrations give a nostalgic feel to the text and realistically portray the era.

This is a beautiful book. It would be great to use with young children to show them what life was like in their grandparents day but it will appeal to readers of all ages especially those "of a certain age" who, like me, can relate to a lot of what Morgan has captured in the book. I highly recommend it.

***Thematic Links:*** St. John's; Life in the 30s; Childhood Memories; Autobiography

Victoria Pennell

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

TANNER, Katie & Bruce Rainnie

***The Top 15: Nova Scotia's Greatest Athletes: Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame***  
Nimbus Publishing, 2018. 127p. Illus. Gr. 6 up. 978-1-77108-701-8. Pbk. \$17.95

Rating: G

Everyone in Canada knows the name Sidney Crosby but how many other Nova Scotia athletes names do they know? Well once they have read this book they should know at least fourteen more. This book is a project of the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame which was designed as a Canada 150 project to recognize the top 15 Nova Scotia athletes of all time. It started with a list of one hundred and two athletes and was narrowed down to twenty-five by a committee of 24 people and then to the top fifteen by a committee of 12 people. The book was made possible by a partnership between the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame and Time Hortons owners in Nova Scotia and all proceeds from the sale of the book will be split between the Hall and Tim Horton's Children's Foundation.

The book is organized from athlete # 15 through to # 1 in 15 chapters. Each chapter gives a biographical account of the athlete highlighting their sports related accomplishments. This is accompanied by colour illustrations, a 'Did you Know' sidebar and a "Take Their Word For It" sidebar which includes a quote about the person. Between each chapter is a list of 15 sports related items collected under different headings such as "15 Memorable Moments in Nova Scotia Sport", "15 Great Nova Scotia Championship Teams", "15 Nova Scotia Women Who Made Their Mark

in Sport” which give brief information about a variety of athletes as well as pictures of some of them. A final chapter of the book gives information about 15 honourable mentions, as well as a page where the reader can list their own top 15.

This book should be well received by sports fans in Nova Scotia as well as others throughout the country who have an interest in individual athletes. The book is well done and will find a place in school and public libraries as well as in the home libraries of many sports fans.

**Thematic Links:** Nova Scotia Athletes; Canadian Sports

Victoria Pennell

### **French Resources**

CHUNG, Arree

***Tout mélangé, histoire de couleurs***

Éditions Scholastic, 2018. Unp. Illus. Gr. Preschool - 2. 978-1-4431-6967-7. Pbk. \$11.99

Rating: E

In the beginning, there were three colours: Red, Yellow, and Blue... so begins, ***Tout mélangé, histoire de couleurs***. Each colour has its own special characteristic - the Reds are the noisiest, the Yellows are the brightest, and the Blues are the most relaxed. The three colours live in harmony until one day, when the Reds decide to declare themselves the “best”. This sets off a competition between the colours, each of which thinks they are better than the other. The competition leaves the colours divided, and they decide to live separately. But they’re all so sad. One day, a Yellow and a Blue come to realize that they feel so wonderful when they’re together; they can’t stay apart anymore! They marry, and they have a baby who is a combination of them both - he is green! He has the brightness of his yellow parent and the calmness of his blue parent, but he is his own, unique colour. The other colours realize that life will be so much better if they blend together, so they combine, and combine, until they represent every colour imaginable.

This book uses simple text and brightly illustrated characters to help readers understand that our lives are richer when we celebrate our differences. The colours are lonely and angry when they exist separately, but when they come together they feel loved and included. This is a sweet book about friendship and what happens when we accept those who look different we do. Teachers and caregivers can use this book to start a discussion about inclusion and diversity. This book can help kids understand that we may not all look the same, but we all want joy and connection. This book would be a great addition to a preschool or elementary classroom or library.

**Thematic Links:** Colours; Inclusion; Diversity

Erin Dagenais