

Picture Books

LAWSON, Jonarno

Sidewalk Flowers

Illustrated by Sydney Smith. Groundwood Books, 2015. 32p. Illus. Gr. Preschool - 2. 978-1-55498-431-2. Hdbk. \$16.95

Rating: E

A girl in red walks through the city with her dad. While he's busy talking on his cell phone, she picks the wildflowers growing up through the cracks of the sidewalks. When she has enough for a colourful bouquet, she lags behind her dad as she presents a flower or two to those who need it. A dead sparrow receives her yellow flowers. A man sleeping on a bench will wake to find a purple flower in his shoe. After she shakes a paw with a dog, she sticks white flowers under his collar. The last flowers are divided amongst her younger siblings, her mom and herself.

This wordless book has full page spreads and a few comic book panels. There are no sound effects or labels. The majority of the pen and ink illustrations are in black and white, but there are splashes of watercolour (the girl's red hooded sweater, the flowers, and the birds) on every page. As the girl shares her wildflowers, the space around her lights up with colours that weren't on the page before. By the end of the book, the girl herself is in full-colour. She feels happy because she's used all her flowers for something positive.

Although the wildflowers are not named in this book, parents and children (or teachers) could pair this story with a book that does identify local flowers; and they could use it while going on their own walk around the neighbourhood. Children could be asked who they would give their flowers too and why. This wordless book is my new favourite.

Thematic Links: Wordless Books; Wildflowers; Gifts; Father and Daughter; Walking

Tanya Boudreau

Fiction Grades 3-6

MCNAUGHTON, Janet

Flame and Ashes: The Great Fire Diary of Triffie Winsor (Dear Canada Series)

Scholastic Canada, 2014. 193p. Illus. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-4431-2443-0. Hdbk. \$16.99

Rating: G/E

This latest volume in the *Dear Canada Series* of diaries by fictional survivors of actual historical events describes the 1892 fire that destroyed two-thirds of St. Johns, Newfoundland. Eleven-year-old Tryphena Winsor, as the daughter of a successful merchant, is a child of privilege, although being in "trade" excludes the family from the highest social circles. Keeping a diary is recommended to Triffie as a curb for her restless energy, and most of her entries record the family's adjustment in the two months after the fire. Their fine home and most of their possessions are lost and they find make-shift quarters on the upper floor of a bleak warehouse. Besides the loss of material goods, Triffie grieves for her beloved brother, who is sent away because the smoke aggravates his asthma. Yet, even as her comfortable life is wiped away in an instant, the disaster yields unexpected benefits. A major one is the lowering of social barriers. Finding three of their "shop girls" in desperate circumstances, the Winsors invite them to share their cramped quarters. Proximity and mutual dependency produces a new appreciation and respect for their employees. It is one of the book's merits that Triffie's own growth and maturity is succinctly conveyed in such a

short period of time. Before the fire, she criticizes a young servant who is insufficiently grateful for one of her cast-off frocks. When Triffie herself receives a “poor box” of nasty old clothes from London, she understands at last that “not all charity is kind.”

The book is well-researched and besides giving a detailed account of the fire and its effects on the city, it provides a vivid sense of life at the end of the Nineteenth Century, when Newfoundlanders speak of “nearby Canada.” The more formal diction of the time and the colourful local idioms (explained in a glossary) add to the historical accuracy. Not long ago, this attractively packaged book would have inspired many young readers to keep diaries. Let’s hope that, even in this age of the internet, some may still be encouraged to do so. Highly recommended.

Thematic Links: Overcoming Hardship; Surviving Disaster; Class Boundaries; History of Nineteenth Century Newfoundland; Newfoundland - Great Fire of 1892

Joan Givner

Fiction Grades 7-12

HURDLE, Crystal

Teacher’s Pets

Tightrope Books, 2014. 157p. Gr. 9+. 978-1-926639-76-5. Pbk. \$21.95

Rating: E

Engaging should be the wrong word to describe this book, with its unsettling subject matter of sexual relationships between teens and their teacher, but somehow Hurdle manages to make a difficult subject accessible for readers. A series of poems, student assignments, and report cards, the story flows from one page to the next, through the different narrator’s voices, weaving together a story that seems harmless at first but soon takes a turn.

Hurdle tells the story of the Venturers wilderness training program at a British Columbia high school. The leader is charismatic, attracting both students and funding to the school and rousing jealousy in his fellow leaders, and especially in those teachers in the more traditional classroom setting. Told from the points of view of student members of the Venturers, teachers at the school, and the principal, the story is spare and leaves space for the reader to settle into the narrative, as gradually more details are revealed about what happens when the Venturers are out in the wilderness. Repetition is used to great effect near the end of the novel, as the true nature of the Venturers leader is undeniably revealed.

This is Hurdle’s second book of poetry. Her first, *After Ted and Sylvia*, was published by Ronsdale Press in 2003.

Her work has also been published in several journals including *Canadian Literature*, *Dalhousie Review*, and the *Literary Review of Canada*. Convincing teens to pick up a book of poetry may not be easy, but this book provides an opportunity to discuss a difficult subject in a non-threatening way.

Thematic Links: Poetry; Teen Wilderness Programs; British Columbia

Jaclyn McLean

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

SMITH, David J.

If...A Mind-Bending New Way of Looking at Big Ideas and Numbers

Illustrated by Steve Adams. Kids Can Press, 2014. 40p. Illus. Gr. 2-6. 978-1-894786-34-8. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

Smith's (*If the World Were a Village*) new non-fiction book scales down huge concepts into something visual and understandable. The first thing he tackles is space. "If the Milky Way galaxy were shrunk to the size of a dinner plate... our whole Solar System - the Sun and the planets - would be far smaller than this speck of dust, too small to see. The visible Universe, on the other hand, would be about the size of Belgium". The author doesn't pretend to have precise figures (The big numbers and data in this book are factual, as far as we know. But nobody knows exactly how old Earth is, or exactly how big the Universe is, or exactly how big Earth's population is, or when the first animals appeared), but with his comparisons, we can understand just how large, far away, or numerous something immeasurable to the human eye really is. He compares the planets to various sports balls, and life on earth to the periods of time on a wristwatch. The events of the last 300 years are condensed down to dates on a calendar, and inventions through time are marked off on a 36 inch tape measure (at zero, people discover fire; and 35. 8, the wheel is invented). The author addresses the size of the continents, and the amount of water on earth. Human life is mentioned on the species of living things page and the population and human life expectancy page (they don't differentiate between male and female). Because the author uses images children are familiar with (a loaf of bread, pizza, a light-bulb, coins, and glasses of water), they can comprehend the author's message. When measuring, he uses percentages, numbers under 100, and fractions. However, abbreviations such as I CE and 1000 BCE are not defined. Each two page spread has a different layout and use of colour. When people are shown, they are both adults and children. Facts are presented in bullet points and fact boxes. Back material includes a note for parents and teachers; there are six activities that can be used at home or a classroom. A small bibliography of books, reports and websites are listed on the last page. This would be a fun book to book-talk to children in grades two to six.

Thematic Links: Numbers; Scale; History; Geography; Space; Life

Tanya Boudreau

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

KUTZ, Michael

If, By Miracle (Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs)

The Azrieli Foundation, 2013. 150p. Gr. 9 up. 978-1-897470-35-0. Pbk. Free

Rating: E

Today, most people who lived through World War II belong to the generation of grandparents or great-grandparents. The legacy of the war - and particularly of the Holocaust - seems somehow diminished as we lose the witnesses to this terrible period. For this reason, ***If, By Miracle*** is an important book: it captures the first-hand story of extraordinary survival.

Michael Kutz was ten years old when he escaped from the *Einsatzgruppen*, a killing unit that gathered the Jews of his town and led them to the forest to be shot en masse. Every other member of his family was murdered (with the exception of his father, who had been mobilized by the Red Army and died in battle). A few months later, Michael joined a resistance group and spent the next two years fighting the Nazis and their collaborators in eastern Poland. When the war finally ended, he was shunted from place to place, trying to find any living relatives and hoping to be selected for life in the new state of Israel. Michael eventually ended up in Canada, where he lived an astonishing adult life of service to others, including advocacy, fund-raising, and leadership.

Despite its significance, this is not a book for every teen reader. ***If, By Miracle*** is a straightforward memoir, written at an advanced level; it is a serious book that demands attentive, thoughtful reading. It includes an extensive glossary, which I found very helpful; a context-setting introduction; maps of Europe prior to and during the war; and a section of photographs of Michael Kutz, often featuring people mentioned in the text. This book is an excellent, vital resource, but only some young-adult readers will be able to navigate the style and presentation.

Michael Kutz is clearly a phenomenal individual and should be recognized for both his work with the resistance during the war and his work on behalf of the Jewish community since coming to Canada. We must not forget the Holocaust, and individual stories of survival are critical to gaining a fuller understanding of this horrifying crime. ***If, By Miracle*** should be in school libraries and public libraries across Canada, not only for teen readers but for

everyone.

Thematic Links: The Holocaust; World War II; History; Memoirs

Leslie Vermeer

Professional Materials

KOECHLIN, Carol and Sandi Zwaan.

Q Tasks - How to Empower Students to Ask Questions and Care About the Answers. 2nd Ed.

Pembroke Publishers, 2014. 159p. 978-1-55138-301-9. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

In the second edition of ***Q Tasks - How to Empower Students to Ask Questions and Care About the Answers***, Carol Koechlin and Sandi Zwaan revisit strategies to empower student learning through questioning skills. This new edition focuses on collaboration, new technologies and inquiry learning experiences that encourage, “*critical thinking, creativity and innovation, collaboration and communication, transliteracies, responsible digital behaviors, cultural and global citizenship and character traits that will empower a growth mindset.*” (p. 6)

Q Tasks is divided into six chapters: Encouraging Curiosity, Understanding Questions, Learning to Question, Questioning to Learn, Questioning to Progress and Moving Forward. The first four chapters focus on building student knowledge of the questioning process in order to facilitate learning. The final two chapters focus on using questions to evaluate resources and facilitate student self-assessment, as well as providing next steps for teachers. Each chapter is full of interesting and practical activities. Chapter One, Encouraging Curiosity, focuses on motivating students by stimulating their natural curiosity through many hands-on and “minds-on” learning experiences such as: 20 Questions, Riddles, and Question Quivers.

Koechlin and Zwaan have updated their very successful teacher resource ***Q Tasks*** by expanding the introductory sections in each chapter, enhancing original activities and adding new Q tasks. This useful resource features numerous lesson plans, organizers, projects, websites, assessment tools and online learning tools. Perhaps the most important change in the 2nd edition of ***Q Tasks*** is the addition of two new sections called “Q Tips” and “Q+.” In “Q Tips” teachers will find additional resources and extensions to enhance student learning. In “Q+” extensions using collaborative technology are the focus.

Some of the Q task activities could be used with primary students; however, the target group for these activities would be junior/intermediate students who are building their critical thinking and research skills. New teachers as well as experienced teachers will definitely be able to use ***Q Tasks*** to enhance student learning. This teacher resource emphasizes the important role of the school library as an essential part of the learning environment for each and every student because “*understanding is a process, not a destination point.*” (p. 7)

Thematic Links: Questioning; Collaboration; Role of Technology; Inquiry Learning; Research Skills; Assessment and Evaluation

Myra Junyk

French Resources

BERGER, Samantha

Grognonstein

Illustrated by Dan Santat. French text by Hélène Pilotto. Éditions Scholastic, 2014. 40p. Illus. Gr. K-2. 978-1-4431-3639-6. Pbk. \$10.99

Rating: E

Samantha Berger is a former Scholastic editor and author of over 70 books. This debut French translation, **Grognonstein**, follows the original English release of *Crankenstein*. Berger has created a monster or is he just a grumpy child?

Grognonstein is not happy. Everything makes him angrily respond with “AAAhgrrr!” After all, it’s hard to bear when you’re having pancakes and there’s no syrup left or your popsicle melts too fast in the sun or you have to swallow horrible cough syrup. Just when Grognonstein has lost all hope in dealing with his problems, he meets someone just like him. Frustration turns to laughter and a happy child emerges, ready to play soccer. Grognonstein has disappeared for today!

“As-tu vu Grognonstein?”

Tu t’en souviendrais très bien si tu l’avais vu.

Quand on lui dit:

Bonjour! Comment vas-tu?

Grognonstein répond:

AAAHGRRR!”

This is a wonderful story for exploring angry feelings and how we choose to react to frustrating problems. Santat portrays the angry child so well you can feel his rigid body, clenched fists, and gritted teeth. A variety of fonts are used to enhance the dialogue between the parent and the monster child, making it fun for young readers to read aloud.

Recommended for classroom teachers and school counsellors.

Thematic Links: Feelings; Anger; Monsters

Lori Austin