

**Resource Links Excerpts**  
**Vol 21, # 3 - February 2016**

**Picture Books**

FLORENCE, Melanie

*Missing Nimâmâ*

Illustrated by François Thisdale. Clockwise Press, 2015. Unp. Illus. Gr. 1-6. 978-0-9939351-4-5. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

*“Once upon a time there was a little girl, a little butterfly, who flew to the telephone every time it rang, hoping against hope that her mother was coming home.”*

*Missing Nimâmâ* is a truly beautiful book. I'm not sure, though, who the audience is. François Thisdale's illustrations enhance this poignant story of a young Aboriginal mother torn from her family in an unexplained way, like so many Aboriginal women in Canada have been. Kateri's mother is lost; Kateri is being raised by her nôhkom, her grandmother, while her mother's spirit watches over her.

The story is told in both voices. We hear the spirit of the young mother as she watches her daughter grow to womanhood. We watch as Kateri tells her own story as she matures under the loving care of her grandmother. We never learn what happened to Kateri's mother; Kateri is a young woman, married, and expecting her first child when the call comes that they have found her mother. What happened is not the issue, though, so much as the years of not knowing, of growing up without a mother, or missing a daughter, a sister, a wife - and having no answers. The depth of this ongoing tragedy is hauntingly portrayed through Florence's poetic words and Thisdale's evocative illustrations.

But to return to my earlier question: who is this book for? It is truly beautiful, but perhaps too powerful for young readers, even if presented through the filter of an adult reader. But who am I to say? I have not lost a mother; I have not needed this story. And it is a story that needs to be both told and heard.

***Thematic Links:*** Highway of Tears (Highway 16, British Columbia); Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women; Loss of a Parent

Karyn Huenemann

**Fiction Grades 3-6**

BECK, Carolyn

*That Squeak*

Illustrated by François Thisdale. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2015. 40p. Illus. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-55455-293-1. Hdbk. \$18.95

Rating: G/E

A story about a young boy whose best friend has died and how he copes with the loss.

Joe remembers with sadness how much fun he had with his best friend Jay. They each had a bike and used to ride it in the countryside and to the lake and reminisces about their conversations.

Joe hides his sadness and one day decides to take Jay's bike that has been left at their school and to bring it home to fix it. When a new boy to his school offers to help, Joe resents him and thinks he wants to steal the bike. Eventually Joe realizes that the new boy only wants to help and they become friends.

A very well written book that deals with the death of a friend at a young age. It describes the sadness that Joe feels and how he copes with it.

***Thematic Links:*** Death; Grief, Friends, Trust

Carmen Poulin, University Administrator (retired), Management Consultant, Ottawa, ON

## **Fiction Grades 7-12**

WELBURN, Cassy

### ***Changelings***

Frontenac House, 2015. 86p. Gr. 10-12. 978-1-927823-33-0. Pbk. \$15.95

Rating: E

In *Changelings*, Casey Welburn presents poems of everyday transformation, rooted in fairy tales, myths, rituals, and ceremonies and shot through with the banal and unremarkable. Boundaries are consistently blurred - dreaming and waking, the natural and the supernatural - rendering images mutable, elusive. Some of the titles appear familiar (e.g., *The Tell Tale Heart*, *The Thousand Nights* and *One Night*), but the poems re-present or embellish what we think we know about these texts, creating palimpsests of stories and retellings that are deeply personal and specific. The poems' many grotesque images are counterpoised against natural and beguiling settings, and produce an eerie atmosphere of creatures on the verge of change.

*Changelings* is a powerful collection for readers 14 and up. With this age group, the book is likely best used as an independent reading assignment or as individual poems. This volume should also provide an emotionally moving text for teachers and librarians, for whom some of the poems may prove acutely identifiable. Reading it, I was spellbound.

**Thematic Links:** Poetry; Family; Fairy Tales; Myth

Leslie Vermeer

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

BARKER, Michelle

### ***A Year of Borrowed Men***

Illustrated by Renné Benoit. Pajama, 2015. Unp. Illus. Gr. 1-4. 978-1-92748-583-5. Hdbk. \$21.95

Rating: E

*A Year of Borrowed Men* tells a story from World War Two that will be unfamiliar to many readers, but is nonetheless a moving part of the history of the German-Canadian community. The author writes from her mother Gerta's recollections, bringing to life the engaging voice of the younger Gerta, whose family hosted three French prisoners-of-war on their German farm in 1944.

World War Two from the German perspective remains somewhat problematic: how do we reconcile decades of erroneous equation of "German" with evil, with the real experiences of many Germans during the war? While the topic is dealt with effectively in some texts - Roberto Innocenti's *Rose Blanche* (1985), Marcus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2006), among others - it will take so many more stories for truth to overcome the stereotypes. *A Year of Borrowed Men* contributes positively and significantly to our understanding of the compassion of some of the German populace who placed themselves in an almost untenable psychological and ideological situation.

Gerta's father was "borrowed" by the German army, and in his place the government sent three French prisoners - Gabriel, Fermaine, and Albert - to work the land. Gerta's innocent narrative perspective ensures that the dark reality of Germany's forced labour policy is not brought out. With the egalitarianism of young children, Gerta cannot understand why the three must live with the animals, and eat in the "pig's kitchen," where the slops were prepared. That was the rule though: these men were prisoners and were to be treated as such. Inviting them in to dinner one night almost sent Gerta's mother to prison herself, yet the family could not deny their fundamental humanity.

Despite regulations, in the face of threats, Gerta and her mother find little ways of making the Frenchmen's lives more tolerable: extra butter on their bread, catalogues to cut into elicited decorations at Christmas, sneaking treats for them to eat. The men reciprocated with affection for their little German *freunde*: "I couldn't keep the borrowed men here," Gerta observes at the end of the war, "but we were friends - and I could keep that forever." The story is made more powerful by the fact that Gerta did indeed keep that friendship alive: enough that her daughter has retold their story for her grandchildren's generation to learn.

**Thematic Links:** Life in Germany in World War II; Hitler's Forced Labour Policy; Human Compassion

Karyn Huenemann

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

HUMPHREYS, Jessica Dee & Michel Chikwanine

***Child Soldier: When Boys and Girls Are Used in War***

Illustrated by Claudia Dávila. Kids Can Press, 2015. 48p. Illus. Gr. 4-9. 978-1-77138-126-0. Hdbk. \$18.95

Rating: E

This is the true story of a Canadian refugee from the Congo, Michel Chikwanine who was kidnapped and used as a child soldier. The book describes the atrocities felt by thousands of child soldiers and the impact of civil wars on families and the world.

This is a very moving book that tells the story of Michel and his life in the Congo. It starts by giving us the history of the Congo and how civil wars killed whole populations. It also describes Congolese family life on a daily level and that in spite of being very poor how happy people were in the small villages.

At the age of 5, Michel was abducted in the school yard along with his friends by a group of rebel soldiers. He and the other children were beaten and drugged and trained to become soldiers and forced to kill. The cruelty of war and especially the impact on these small child soldiers is described in a heartbreaking way.

After two weeks, Michel escaped the camp and made his way home but the impact of what he endured would change him and mark him for the rest of his life. The story continues to show the difficulties of life for Michel's family as well as for the people of the Congo and other African countries. The civil wars continue to this day. Michel's dad eventually dies and Michel along with his mother and one sister immigrate to Canada. He eventually manages to bring one other sister to Canada and unfortunately his other sister disappears never to be heard from again.

An unforgettable book that provides factual information about civil wars and especially child soldiers. It is also a call for help to try and end the practice of child soldiers.

**Thematic Links:** Congo - History; Congo - Civil War; Child Soldiers

Carmen Poulin

### **Audio-Visual Materials**

DIAMOND, Charlotte and Matt

***Diamonds by the Sea***

Hug Bug Music, 2015. Gr. Preschool - 3. CDCD331. \$15.00

Rating: E

This is Charlotte Diamond's 14<sup>th</sup> album and children will be delighted by the variety of new songs written and performed by Diamond and her son Matt. There are nineteen short songs and a booklet of lyrics is included with the CD. According to the website, there is also a CD of band tracks available so teachers can play the music and have their students supply the vocals. Two of the songs are in French, one is in Spanish and the rest have English lyrics.

Playing time from start to finish is 50 minutes. A list of song titles is available on the website. (<https://charlottediamond.com>)

Most songs are up-beat, happy and bouncy but there are a couple of quieter, slower numbers which make a good change of pace. The CD includes local musicians, a children's choir from BC's Sunshine Coast and a wide variety of instruments. The words are simple and the tunes are catchy so even quite young children could soon sing along. The themes include water, wildlife and family, stressing caring both for the environment and for each other. The music would fit in well with a unit about the environment or around the celebration of Earth Day in April. Many of the songs lend themselves to adding actions and/or dancing so there is a chance for children to get out of their seats in the classroom and have some fun moving around. The website offers a teachers' corner for educators interested in making use of the CD with their students.

**Thematic Links:** Music; Environment; Wildlife

Ann Ketcheson

### **Professional Materials**

SWARTZ, Larry and Shelley Stagg Peterson.

***This is a Great Book! 101 Events for Building Enthusiastic Readers Inside and Outside the Classroom - From Chapter Books to Young Adult Novels***

Pembroke Publishers, 2015. 136 p. 9781-55138-3088. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

Why are novels so important in our lives? Larry Swartz and Shelley Stagg Peterson attempt to answer this question in their new book, ***This is a Great Book!*** Novels allow readers to read about imaginary events that they might never experience as they become participants in the story. "*Reading novels thereby provides young people with an opportunity to reflect on human behaviors, emotions, values, relationships, and conflicts.*" (p. 5)

What is a great book? Swartz and Peterson define a "great" book as, "*a book that will have significant impact on a young reader: that will stay with the reader long after it has been returned to the shelf.*" (p. 6) This connection will depend on the individual reader, their life experiences, their environment and their cultural background.

This resource is full of useful information, thoughtful reflection and lively commentary on novels, literacy instruction and reading response. It is divided into four chapters: "Novels in the Classroom," "Which Novels for Which Reader," "Independent Leisure Reading," and "Responding to Novels." Each chapter emphasizes the importance of student voice and choice in selecting the novels they will be reading. There are extensive book lists including both traditional novels and newer novels for readers ages 8 to 15. There are also many useful blackline masters for both student and teacher reflection.

Various approaches to novel study are discussed. A study of novel instruction conducted by teacher candidates in Junior and Intermediate classrooms found that, "*whole-class community read is still the most common way to teach novels in the classroom.*" (p. 21) Many classrooms used traditional novels such as *The Giver*, *The Outsiders* and *Hatchet*. Student interests and choices were not considered. There are numerous suggestions for other approaches to organizing novel study and reading response activities.

Teachers who are interested in promoting the love of reading will definitely enjoy this new resource by Larry Swartz and Shelley Stagg Peterson. It follows in a long tradition of resources about good books such as: *The Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease, *Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels and *A Guide to Canadian Children's Books in English* by Ken Setterington and Deirdre Baker. The importance of reading is central to this resource, "*When reading novels in the classroom, students do more than learn to read; they create identities as readers and come to feel that they are part of a community of readers.*" (p. 5)

**Thematic Links:** Reading Response; Novel Selection; Motivation; Whole Class Instruction; Independent Reading

Myra Junyk

## **French Materials**

PALLOTTA, Jerry

*Veux-tu être mon valentin?*

Illustrated by David Biedrzycki. Éditions Scholastic, 2015. 30p. Illus. Gr. K-2. 978-1-4431-3466-8. Pbk. \$10.99

Rating: E

February 14 is coming up and Henriette, a pink hippo, is busy writing her Valentine cards. She wonders who will be her Valentine this year. Off she goes with her stack of cards looking for the special someone. Along the way, she meets Leo the leopard, Dominic the dolphin, Pierre the butterfly, Claude the toad, Eric the elephant, Marcel the skunk, and so on. To her surprise, they all turn down her invitation to become her Valentine because they claim that they are too different from her. Henriette is sad, but even with a broken heart, wants to take part in the Valentine party. And what happens next? All the friends who refused to be her Valentine are busy cheering her up and giving her Valentine cards. How do they explain their change of hearts? It was a joke! Of course they love Henriette and welcome their differences. In the end, everyone had a great Valentine day!

This story lends itself to a great discussion. Why is being different a good thing? Jokes are generally funny and not intended to hurt someone's feelings. Kids can share their reaction at the joke played on Henriette. A good activity would be to ask kids to find all the hearts in the story, including the heart-shaped hedge. Another interesting question: what is the giraffe planning to do and is she successful?

***Thematic Links:*** Valentine Day; Finding the Special Someone; Being Different; Jokes

Suzanne Dagenais