

Picture Books

SCHWARTZ, Joanne

Town is by the Sea

Illustrated by Sydney Smith. Groundwood Books, 2017. Unp. Illus. Gr. K-3. 978-1-55498-871-6. Hdbk. \$21.95

Rating: E

Town is by the Sea is a delightful picture book that tells the story of a young boy who grows up living by the sea in a small mining town. Written in first person narrative, the story compares the young boy's daily routine with that of his father who toils in the underground mines. The boy sees the sea when he awakes each morning, realizing the importance of its existence in his life. He is a normal young boy, playing with friends, enjoying life, but realizing that living in a mining town has many expectations. The sea has a special connotation for this book because it is under the sea that the young boy's father goes each day, digging for coal. There is also the realization for the young boy that he too will one day work in the mines; just like his father does; the carefree days of childhood will one day disappear and be replaced by the dark tunnel below the sea. The narrator's voice is direct, matter of fact; readers can speculate themselves on the message hidden in the words.

This book is very representative of life in a Cape Breton coal-mining town; the author has used scenes, examples, etc. of her life growing up in New Waterford, Cape Breton to tell the story. Many Cape Breton coal mining towns consisted of rows and rows of company houses, where these duplex style units often looked entirely different on each side, as seen in this story. Included in the book is an author's note explaining what it was like to be a boy in Cape Breton in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The author includes a quote from a book as well in her note (*Boys in the Pits: Child Labour in Coal Mines* by Robert McIntosh). Other subtle examples of the way of life in Cape Breton are provided to give the reader a true sense of the boy's world (e.g. baloney sandwich).

Sydney Smith's illustrations (ink, watercolour, gouache) effectively contrast the charming town by the sea with the dark reality of the coal mine. Any reader not familiar with coal mining will certainly visit a picturesque way of life in Cape Breton, especially the reality of being underground. Near the end of the book, there are a series of illustrations showing the front door of the house, with sunlight peeking through the door's window; and in each scene, there are subtle changes of life outside that door, to the last image of the father opening the door as he returns home from the mine; there is no text on this two page spread, but there is much being said in the images. There are many scenes of everyday life, each providing hints of life in this seaside town.

Town is by the Sea is a book would work well in classrooms, bringing connections to a time period in Canadian history where coal mining was a part of each family's world. The history of mining is very rich in Cape Breton, and the author's note further alludes to that history. It is a story that will have readers thinking even after the last page is read, and the book closed. The mines are for the most part gone in Cape Breton today; revitalization is being attempted, but what lies ahead is unforeseen. Joanne Schwartz has created a realistic and wonderful portrayal of Cape Breton's marriage to coal.

Reviewer's Note: Having grown up myself in a Cape Breton coal mining town, I find this book 100% accurate in its depiction of life during the mining days. As the granddaughter of a coal miner who lost his life deep in the mines during a runaway trip in 1938, this book has a special place in my heart for its realism, poetic and quiet rendition of Cape Breton life. There are still company houses that exist today in Cape Breton, many with different sides in each duplex. Baloney is also an aspect in the diet of many Cape Bretoners, including me; it's almost a tradition to have a baloney sandwich at lunch. The author's dedication to her father Irving Schwartz, a well-known businessman on the island, is a special tribute to a Cape Bretoner who knew the importance and value of the mines. Ironically, I agree with Mr. Schwartz's words: "*we owe everything to the miner*". For in reality, it was the mines that brought my grandfather from Italy to work underground, and enabled me to have an amazing life on the island portrayed by Joanne Schwartz and Sydney Smith.

Thematic Links: Seaside; Coal Mining; Child Labour; Family Life in Cape Breton

Carmelita Cechetto-Shea

Fiction Grade 3-6

DONOGHUE, Emma

The Lottery Plus One

Illustrated by Caroline Hadilaksono. HarperCollinsCanada, 2017. 305p. Illus. Gr. 4-7. 978-1-44344-557-3. Hdbk. \$19.99

Rating: E

Sumac Lottery, the nine-year old narrator of Emma Donoghue's novel, *The Lottery Plus One*, lives in a world of multiples. She has four parents - two mothers who are married to each other, and two fathers who are also married to each other. She is the fifth child in a family of seven. All of the children are named after trees. Her 32-room Toronto home, Camelottery, is filled with nooks and crannies. All of the siblings are homeschooled so they are constantly learning as they go out for excursions in the community. There are also multiple races and cultures represented in the family's biological and adopted children: Aboriginal, Jamaican, Indian and Canadian. The youngest two children (Brian and Oak) both have special needs. Brian was originally born as Briar, but now considers herself a boy. Oak was shaken as a baby and has developmental delays. Into this mix of multiples, comes a new member - a "Plus One." PopCorn gets a phone call insisting that he come to the Yukon to deal with a family crisis. His father can no longer live in his home because of a fire and his worsening dementia. Sumac travels with her father thinking that they will have an exotic adventure in the Yukon; instead, she meets a grumpy grandfather who comes back to live with them. It is a difficult situation for the entire family as they deal with a new member who doesn't want to be in Toronto, and who disagrees with everything that goes on in the household. "*Trap me in this weirdy commune!*" (p. 194) Sumac is most affected because she must give up her room for Grumps. At first, she tries to make it work, but soon starts to think that Grumps belongs somewhere else. Can she make this happen?

This is a wonderfully funny and endearing novel about a family that is anything but "ordinary." The four parents have decided to raise their seven children in cheerful chaos where education is determined by each child in the context of their local community. Above all, the Lotterys believe in love, laughter and empathy for others. When Grumps arrives, he struggles to fit in to his new circumstances. He objects to virtually everything going on at Camelottery: the same-sex marriages, the lack of formal schooling, the organic food, the multicultural mixture of children and parents, and the environmentalism.

Caroline Hadilaksono's illustrations give a vibrant visual context to a complex and intricate narrative. Emma Donoghue's novel is filled with varied characters, names and relationships, and it may be difficult for young readers to figure them out at first, but they will definitely enjoy this truly magical story. Readers will be reminded of the importance of family and community by the John Donne quote written on a Lottery mirror, "*No man is an island.*" Also available in French.

Thematic Links: Diversity; Family Relationships; Same-sex Marriage; Dementia; Gender Roles; Home Schooling; Adoption; Racism; Change

Myra Junyk

Fiction Grades 7-12

NICHOLSON, Lorna Schultz

Bent not Broken: Madeline & Justin (One-2-One Series)

Clockwise Press, 2017. 197p. Gr. 8-12. 978-1-988347-03-5. Pbk., \$12.95

Rating: E

Bent not Broken is the third book in the *One-2-One Series*, which traces the lives of teens who are participating in the Best Buddies program at Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School. Each novel focuses on one specific pair of teens, in this case, Madeline and Justin. Madeline sustained a traumatic brain injury as a result of a bike accident, and sometimes feels like she should wear a sign around her neck that says, "*I fell off my bike. I hurt my brain.*" Madeline worries that her peers are judging her for her slow speech and uncontrollable emotional outbursts. To make

matters worse, Madeline's beloved twin sister is becoming increasingly rebellious, ignoring Madeline in favour of new friends. Madeline takes solace in the time she spends with miniature therapy horses and her friendship with Justin. Justin is the president of the school's Best Buddies club, and is grieving the loss of his autistic sister, while navigating his final year of high school and watching his mother grapple with debilitating depression. While the book's subject matter is raw and at times difficult, ***Bent not Broken*** ultimately celebrates the power of friendship and unconditional support. Together, Madeline and Justin help each other cope with their personal problems by operating from a place of kindness and understanding. Nicholson highlights this reciprocal relationship by alternating between their perspectives chapter by chapter. It is an effective device that allows readers to connect deeply with both characters. In particular, the narrative successfully honours diverse abilities and capacities by providing a nuanced portrayal of Madeline, making sure that she is never defined simply by her brain injury. Instead, readers witness her flourish as a result of her own self-determination, making Madeline an exceptionally strong and relatable heroine.

Bent not Broken stands as a highly recommended teen title written with sensitivity and an eye for inclusivity.

Thematic Links: Brain Injury; Therapy; Peer Pressure; Guilt; High School; Friendship; Family; Support; Kindness; Healing

Chloe Humphreys

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

Leaving My Homeland Series: MASON, Helen. *A Refugee's Journey From Afghanistan* (978-0-7787-3125-2); *A Refugee's Journey From Syria* (978-0-7787-3128-3); RODGER, Ellen. *A Refugee's Journey From The Democratic Republic of the Congo* (978-0-7787-3126-9); *A Refugee's Journey From Iraq* (978-0-7787-3127-6) Crabtree Publishing, 2017. 32p. Illus. Gr. 3-6. Hdbk. \$21.56 ea.

Rating: E

This new series from Crabtree is very timely with the refugee crisis which is happening around the world. The books offer the story of a child from each country who has been forced to leave their homeland because of the unrest and war which is taking place there. The books are arranged in an interesting format with alternating two-page spreads telling the story of the child and the story of the country and its past and present situations. The child's story is written in an italic script and told in the first person which makes it very personal - almost like a personal letter. The very readable text is accompanied by captioned photographs, illustrations and maps. Throughout there are text boxes referring to the various "UN Rights of the Child" and the country's "Story in Numbers". There is a "You Can Help!" page at the back of the book along with Discussion Prompts which would be good for use in a classroom. The books contain a table of contents, a glossary, a learning more section and an index.

These books are very well done with interesting text and colourful graphics on coloured pages. The children's personal stories will give readers a glimpse into what life is like for the many children who have been forced out of their country and way of life and find themselves in refugee camps and foreign countries. The information about the countries also provides an explanation of what is happening in the country and why so many people have to leave. These books are an excellent addition to the elementary level especially at this time when so many refugees are moving into Canada and becoming part of our classrooms. They can be very helpful in explaining to the students where these new students are coming from and why we need to be mindful of their situation and accepting of them into our society. I would recommend them for all elementary school and public libraries.

Thematic Links: Refugees; Refugee Children; Syria - Refugees; Iraq - Refugees; Afghanistan - Refugees; The Democratic Republic of the Congo - Refugees

Victoria Pennell

Non-Fiction 7-12

Cutting-Edge Careers in STEM Series: HYNSON, Colin. ***Dream Jobs in Engineering*** (978-0-7787-2945-7); ***Dream Jobs in Math*** (978-0-7787-2963-1); ***Dream Jobs in Technology*** (978-0-7787-2967-9); OXLADE, Chris. ***Dream Jobs in Science*** (978-0-7787-2965-5)
Crabtree Publishing, 2017. 32p. Illus. Gr. 5-8. Hdbk. \$21.56

Rating: G

The objective of the *Cutting-Edge Careers in STEM Series* is simple, to encourage young readers into believing that a life under various branches of technology is both exciting and useful. Or as they state themselves: “*Learn how the study of STEM subjects - science, technology, engineering, and math - can lead to thrilling and meaningful careers.*” Remaining loyal to the STEM acronym, the authors produced four books in this series, covering employment opportunities like a travel brochure, with dramatic text and colourful layouts representing each one.

Dream Jobs in Engineering covers practical jobs such as 3-D printing, making body parts, building ships, helping the environment and making toys. One practical job, as a “drilling engineer” promises positions in exotic places throughout the world, with a colourful picture of a drilling platform on the sea. Some of the more glorious or “thrilling” jobs involve helping a Grand Prix race team maintain and build their cars. As a “race engineer” one can become part of the action.

Dream Jobs in Math covers practical jobs such as transit planning, big data analysis, climatology, humanitarian logisticians and aerodynamics. Scenes of people saving others from catastrophe are frequently utilized, stressing the importance of many positions available. Careers in visual effects and music data analysis highlight opportunities in the world of celebrity, something a mathematician may not consider.

Dream Jobs in Science cover a lot of jobs that take the scientist outside the lab. You may very well find yourself working on a grand scale, such as positions as a planet hunter, storm tracker, atom smasher, volcanologist, archaeologist, or astronaut. One could also work in the biological realm, as a genetic engineer or bio-mechanic.

Dream Jobs in Technology covers various types of jobs in software design such as games development, app development, ethical hacking, cryptology and virtual reality. As well, some emphasis is placed upon drone technology and nanotechnology.

All jobs in the STEM series are presented with a “route” to the specific opportunity via a well chosen education. And therein lies the value in these standard text books, that it is meant to encourage young people to choose a responsible path in life, one that is practical yet exciting. While many of the jobs are similar across the various STEM disciplines, it makes sense that they be split up into separate books, allowing for a colour coded set that is more visually appealing in their distinction. As well, each set has its own glossary at the back, allowing the prospective individual even more resources in an already informative set.

Thematic Links: Technology; Math; Engineering; Science; Jobs

Zachary Chauvin

Professional

MANDEL, Joey

Keep Growing: How to Encourage Students to Persevere, Overcome Setbacks and Develop a Growth Mindset
Pembroke Publishers, 2017. 126p. 978-1-55136-320-0. Pbk.\$24.95

Rating: E

Keep Growing examines the factors that encourage children to try new things and learn new skills. It explores how a “growth mindset” can enhance student success. Joey Mandel, teacher and educational consultant specializing in peer-to-peer relationships, focuses on promoting growth in the classroom, “*How do we, as teachers, provide opportunities for children to change their mindsets? How do we foster and nurture their ability and desire to start hard tasks and push through them when they are stuck, to try something new when they do not know the answer, to build a sense of value for the effort and the completion of an activity over the success of it, and finally, to work on or add to something that they have finished in order to make it better?*” (p. 7)

The nine chapters in this resource rely heavily on research about growth mindsets. The first chapter, “Mindset for Growth,” explains that individuals with a growth mindset believe that they can learn new things with hard work, effort and positive self-talk. This belief affects attitudes, actions, and responses to challenges. In order to promote this kind of mindset, teachers need to explicitly teach learning skills and character traits such as empathy, organization and self-regulation. The second chapter outlines classroom organization to promote a growth mindset. Chapters 3-8 address specific characteristics of a growth mindset: responsibility, independence, self-regulation, perspective, initiative, and resilience. Each chapter explains the characteristic, applies it to the classroom environment and gives teachers strategies and activities in various subject areas such as language arts, media studies, mathematics, art and drama. The final chapter addresses the importance of family support to enhance student success through the home-school connection.

Throughout this resource, there are numerous useful ideas for classroom teachers. Joey Mandel explains the connections between home, school, extra-curricular activities and future accomplishments. Helping students to build a growth mindset will help them succeed in all aspects of their future lives. There are descriptions of specific activities in various subject areas as well as blackline masters. This book provides a useful resource for both new and experienced teachers who want to improve the learning environment and learning outcomes for their students. Joey Mandel urges co-operation to promote a growth mindset, “*Parents and teachers need to use tools and a common approach to support these children. We need to let them know that they can do more than they think they can, that it is okay just to try, and that the attempt is where the learning happens.*” (p. 12)

Thematic Links: Growth Mindsets; Classroom Environment; Responsibility; Independence; Initiative; Resilience; Home-School Connection

Myra Junyk

French

KIRBY, Matthew J.

Last Descendants (An Assassin’s Creed Series)

Éditions Scholastic, 2016. Traduit de l’anglais par Anath Riveline. 357p. Gr. 10-12. 978-1-4431-6036-0. Pbk. \$18.99.

Rating: E

In this novel, inspired by the *Assassin’s Creed* video game series, Owen’s life is in turmoil since the death of his father, a man accused of a crime that his son is convinced he did not commit. When Owen meets Monroe, his school tech expert, he is offered the possibility of exploring the past and his ancestry. Owen accepts this proposal and is transported to the era of the Mexican Conquistadors where he discovers an ancient relic, the dagger of Hernan Cortes, for which two secret societies, the Brotherhood of the Assassins and the Templar Order, are currently vying. To prevent this relic from falling into the wrong hands, Monroe brings together a group of six adolescents whose ancestors all have a connection to the relic and sends them back in time with the goal of finding the dagger before the secret societies. Transported to 1863 New York, the group finds themselves in the midst of riots and come to realize just how much the past influences the present.

In this suspenseful novel, the author seamlessly blends history and fiction in an engaging way and will encourage readers to think about the ramifications of past actions on the future, as well as the importance of ancestral connections. Readers will engage with and relate to the protagonist, Owen, a young man in search of his identity and the truth. Students with an interest in history and genealogy will find this novel particularly appealing, as will students who enjoy video games and the *Assassin’s Creed* games and this novel would be a great addition to the advanced French Immersion classroom and libraries.

Thematic Links: Science-Fiction; Fantasy; Quest and Adventure; Ancestors and History; Memory; Family; Truth

Amy J Flight