

Resource Links Excerpts
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Picture Books

MOORE, Clement C.

Twas the Night Before Christmas: Edited by Santa Claus for the Benefit of Children of the 21st Century

Illustrated by Elena Almozova and Vitaly Shvarov. Grafton & Scratch, 2012. Unp. Illus. Gr. Preschool - adult. 978-0-9879023-0-6. Hdbk. \$16.95

Rating: E

The classic children's poem written 189 years ago by Clement C. Moore has been re-released many times and in many formats since the original publication. Now, however, with the release of this particular edition there is some controversy over the omission of certain lines and whether or not we should be meddling with the original text. This particular edition, published by Pamela McColl at Grafton and Scratch omits the verse "The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, and the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath". McColl is a child advocate and feels very strongly about sending the wrong message to children by having Santa Claus smoking therefore she has omitted this particular verse in this edition of the book. As she claims in the subtitle - the book has been "edited by Santa Claus for the benefit of the children of the 21st century".

Whether or not you agree with the omission, McColl has produced a beautiful version of the classic poem. The full colour double spread illustrations by Elena Almozova and Vitaly Shvarov are beautifully done and enhance the bright mood of the poem. Brilliant colours, lots of detail and facial expressions add greatly to the text.

I would certainly recommend this edition for school and public libraries and for personal purchase for young children. It might be interesting to compare this version with some of the others which have been produced in recent years and might even spark discussion of the dangers of smoking in some older readers.

The book is also available in French, in e-book formats and in a soft cover edition for non-profit agencies through the offices of the publisher.

Thematic Links: Christmas Stories; Smoking

Victoria Pennell

Fiction Grades 3-6

GUEST, Jacqueline

Outcasts of River Falls

Couteau Books, 2012. 242 p. Gr. 5-8. 978-1-55050480-4. Pbk. \$9.95

Rating: E

The Red River Resistance (or Rebellion) of 1869, the North-West Resistance (or Rebellion) of 1885; these are pivotal moments in Canada's history. In the first act of resistance, Métis leaders Louis Riel and Gabrielle Dumont succeeded in establishing a provisional government and treaty with the Canadian Government (although it ultimately did not go so very well); in the second, the Métis were completely defeated, and Louis Riel was hanged for high treason. So much is well known, but after the North-West Resistance the fate of the Métis people slips into the fog of history, silenced by a loud English-speaking voice from the historical East. In ***Outcasts of River Falls***, Jacqueline Guest creates a strong voice for the Métis people, telling a small part of their history in a way that young readers will not only learn from, but enjoy.

In *Belle of Batoche* (2004), Guest introduces us to Belle Tourond, who during the North-West Resistance comes to recognize her own fortitude and abilities. In ***Outcast of River Falls***, Belle helps her young niece Katy discover her own strength and establish a pride in being Métis. Raised in Toronto without any knowledge of her Métis heritage, the orphaned Kathryn is sent to Alberta to join her Aunt Belle. Landed in a strange and hostile environment, Katy

must not only learn a new culture, but adjust her sense-of-self to incorporate her new social position as one of the Road Allowance People: the Métis, who were not permitted to own land and so lived on the government-owned road allowances (that is, until someone White or otherwise privileged wanted the land). Katy's confusion, the mistakes she makes, the questions she has but is afraid to ask: all ring true. Her position as not-visibly Métis complicates her experiences, and helps her - and the reader - truly understand the evils of prejudice and bigotry. The plot involves a mysterious Robin Hood figure who has been righting some of the smaller injustices perpetrated against the Métis people. Add in a crooked, offensive police officer, and a murdered bank guard, and you have the recipe for a culturally sensitive situation to which, ultimately, Katy must actively contribute. In acting to save her Aunt Belle, Katy finally accepts her true heritage: she ends with her Toronto dreams of being a lawyer firmly reestablished, but now altered: she will not only be a female lawyer on the vanguard of Canadian social progress, but a female *Métis* lawyer, bound by conscience to fight for the rights of her people.

Outcasts of River Falls comes with an effective Novel Study Guide, which includes synopses of the chapters as well as activities (for example, a 1900 Eaton catalogue to price purchases Katy might have made) and thoughtful study questions. This very engaging novel combined with the study guide will help elementary school teachers of early Canadian history immensely.

Thematic Links: Louis Riel; North-West Resistance; Road Allowance People; Alberta History; Métis Culture and History; Michif Language

Karyn Huenemann

Fiction Grades 7-12

MAC, Carrie

The Opposite of Tidy

RazorBill/Penguin Books, 2012. 332p. Gr. 9up. 978-0-14-318091-3. Pbk. \$16.00

Rating: E

Junie's parent have split and she's decided to stay with her mother and the garbage that goes with her... literally. Junie's mother is a compulsive hoarder. Junie knows it's not healthy, but her mother needs her and she won't stay with her father and 'that woman'. Nobody knows what Junie's life is really like so when Wade offers Junie a ride home she accepts but gets dropped off at her best friend Tabitha's house. Wade is interested, but Junie can't let him into her real life, so she constructs one.

The Opposite of Tidy is the perfect blend of humour, hardship and teen drama. Mac sets up Junie's world flawlessly, with descriptions so accurate and amazing it's hard to read. Junie's embarrassment of her mother's mental illness, and her waffling between enabling and avoidance is so well depicted. The plot seems to be a straight forward teen drama, but whenever you think you have it figured out Mac throws another twist at you. Most of the secondary characters are flat and two dimensional, but it works because you feel that Junie is choosing to see them in only one way. Mac has hit the mark with ***The Opposite of Tidy***. I highly recommend this novel for all high schools or YA collections.

Thematic Links: Hoarding; Mental Illness; Divorce

Corinne Mathews

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

SKRYPUCH, Marsha Forchuk

One Step at a Time: A Vietnamese Child Finds Her Way

Pajama Press, 2012. 92p. Illus. Gr. 3-6. 978-1-927485-02-6. Pbk. \$12.95

Rating: G

One Step at a Time is an easy-to-read book about Tuyet, a Vietnamese girl adopted by a Canadian family. It is the sequel to *Last Airlift: A Vietnamese Orphan's Rescue from War* and picks up where that book leaves off. Tuyet suffers great pain from having a weak ankle. Just weeks after her adoption, her new family decides Tuyet should have surgery to correct the problem. Tuyet goes through the surgery, learns to use crutches, and takes physiotherapy in the hope of one day being able to walk confidently on her own two feet.

At the same time, Tuyet, who speaks little English, is learning about her new family, new home, and new culture and is healing from terrifying experiences in Vietnam. Events that seem ordinary to many Canadian children are extraordinary for Tuyet, and we share her confusion and delight as situations - such a flaming cake and a pile of pretty boxes, or the passing of a crop-dusting airplane - begin to resolve into meaning.

This is a gentle nonfiction telling of a particular period in Canadian history and of the experience of being a new immigrant with health concerns. Notes in the end matter provide some useful context for readers who may not understand the significance of polio or the conventions of narrative nonfiction. Black-and-white photos, including pictures of Tuyet and her family, add to the reading experience. Although Tuyet's experiences are unusual and sometimes frightening, the narrative is full of love, kindness, and comfort.

One Step at a Time is a good choice for sensitive young readers interested in nonfiction about other children, other cultures, and recent history; it may be eye-opening for many readers. Although aspects of Canadian culture have changed, the disorientation that new Canadians experience may be similar to Tuyet's. The book is likely to encourage many questions and wide-ranging discussion in a reading group, and the story is highly likeable. Readers do not need to know the author's earlier book about Tuyet to understand this one, but many will want to read more about this brave and spirited girl.

Thematic Links: Families, Adoption, Vietnam, Health and wellness

Leslie Vermeer

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

LANE, Ray W.

In Chariots of Iron (The Personal Adventures of a Soldier in a Canadian Armoured Brigade During World War II)

Self-Published, 2009. 207p. Illus. Gr. 8 up. 978-6-03-892949-0. Pbk. \$18.95

Rating: E

Ray W. Lane is one of the boys. He is colourful, humorous and just as frightened as any of the other soldiers in World War II. But most importantly, he is never alone, for the comradeship he describes, is a testament to the cohesive force that made up the Allied forces in their battle against the Axis powers. ***In Chariots of Iron***, is a primary account from one of the many soldiers that fought in the European Theatre of World War II.

Lane speaks with candour, as he relates his experience. His voice is true to his personality, as he comes at the reader in a first person perspective, effectively reeling us into the story. He runs through his military training in Western Canada before delving into his action as part of a crew operating Sherman tanks in Northern Europe. We follow his ordeals and are led through many of his battles, beginning in Normandy, to his route crossing the Rhine, and finally his descriptions as a witness of the concentration camp in Bergen Belsen. All of the scenes are gritty, and honest. Lane makes no attempt at smoothing over the edges or concealing the hardship that he encountered. It provides for the reader an enthralling portrayal, straight from the memory of a man who actually experienced the war. The tank battles are suspenseful and one is left feeling that death is truly just waiting in the wings. Indeed, many of the men he fought alongside met their fate before his very eyes, but somehow the remaining soldiers managed to transpire, with impossible courage.

Due to the horror many experienced in World War II, it is rare to find individuals who are most willing to share their experiences. The honesty of ***In Chariots of Iron*** is a marvel to behold, as it is a veritable and primary source on that most unfortunate period in human history. Ray W. Lane should be applauded for his courage not only during the war

but his willingness to recount the unfortunate trauma of his young life.

Thematic Links: Europe; Canadians; Vancouver; Normandy; Britian; Germany; World War II; Modern History

Zachary G. Chauvin

Professional Materials

PARR, Michelann and Terry Campbell

Balanced Literacy Essentials: Weaving Theory into Practice for Successful Instruction in Reading, Writing, and Talk

Pembroke Publishers, 2012. 160p. 978-1-55138-275-3. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

Balanced Literacy Essentials provides classroom teachers in grades 3 through 8 with practical instruction for literacy programs. The program begins with the child at the centre of the learning process, and the ideas for instruction are built on this premis. The teacher takes the role of “navigator” to guide the students through a variety of structures and strategies to successful balanced literacy learning. Students become readers, writers, critical listeners and critical thinkers, while engaging in tasks which empower them as individual learners. The book includes a table of contents, an index, references, side bars, tips and strategies, text boxes, and black line masters. This dynamic teacher resource is highly recommended as a tool for designing a successful, child-centred literacy program which scaffolds skills for success.

Sharon P. Armstrong

Audio-Visual Materials

LAMBERT, Mary

Worms & Dirt: Music for our Beautiful World

Mary Lambert Productions, 2012. CD. Gr. Preschool - 3. \$15.99

Rating: E

Bouncy, energetic, jazzy, rhythmic, up beat and a little bit rock n’ roll. ***Worms & Dirt*** is nothing less than a musical rainbow that gets you wriggling like a worm.

The 14 tracks on this CD include remakes of a couple of well-known tunes “Rockin’ Robin” and “Down By the Bay” that has a “goose that kisses a moose”. “Dig Me” although an original Mary Lambert, has a medley of various children’s voices, melodies and nursery rhymes including segments of the classic “It’s Raining it’s Pouring”.

There is a country twist to “Down at the Worm Farm” bringing to life animals that are not seen on a worm farm such as pigs, dogs and lambs. A similar concept to that of ‘Old MacDonald Had A Farm’, Lambert lists the animals and then makes the noises. In the end the squishy, slimy, tunnelling working worms are what is seen.

Lambert also takes us through mini adventures and teaches us about the geography of Canada in “Eh Canada” and the stereotypes such as, playing hockey, and flying south on a “Canadian goose”, yet through repetition Canada is spelt in a comedic way.

However the ultimate message and goal to this CD is within some of these songs “My Tree House” that teaches children about planting more trees and breathing fresh air. “Go, Go Green” emphasises how green is the best colour equating it to trees, plants, hills and Earth. In “My Little Hands” sung with the intention to become like a classic or an anthem, describes our hands as gifts to help. “Lola the Litter Bug” is about Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. “Turn It Off” is about conserving water and electricity. Finally “My Beautiful World” cleverly illustrating the five senses when describing the importance of how wonderful Earth is.

Worms & Dirt, although it sounds slimy and displeasing, will get children getting their hands dirty burrowing down like worms and helping Earth stay clean.

Thematic Links: Worms; Soil; Recycling; Earth; Nature and Environment; Music

Lara Chauvin

French Materials

BOISVERT, Jocelyn Boisvert

Esprits de Famille: Tome 1 - Bienvenue chez les Paradis

Editions FouLire, 2012. 203p. Gr. 4-8. 978-2-89591-142-5. Pbk. \$11.95

Rating: E

Tragedy strikes Mathieu Paradis at the very beginning of this book when he learns that his parents, twin brother and little sister have all been killed in a car accident. He must deal with the many emotions this brings but he is unprepared when, during the funeral, his entire family is standing beside their caskets and later, in the cemetery, they are all standing around their tombstone rather than 'resting in peace'. With help from his dead family and his very alive friend Jules, Mathieu is able to figure out exactly what happened during the accident and realizes it is linked to the robbery of a *depanneur* downtown. Bravely, Mathieu tries to seek revenge on the culprits and fortunately, when that doesn't work very well, the police are there to lend a hand and see that justice is done.

Boisvert plays with readers throughout the book, making this a most interesting young adult novel. We are close to tears when we realize Mathieu's situation and, like his aunt and uncle and other adults, we can't imagine what life will be like for the young teen without his family around him. On the other hand, the images of the family standing around their tombstone and being more or less normal is very amusing. Mathieu tries to keep them happy by taking things for them to read and their favourite board game to play, and the band in which his brother played even drops by to share some music and lift his spirits. (Pun intended!)

Young adults will enjoy the humour of the book as well as the adventure and mystery as Mathieu tries to piece together what happened to his family and then, with the rather grudging help of his friend Jules, goes after the two losers who committed the break-in at the *depanneur* and who contributed to his family's accident in their rush to leave the scene. Given that this book is entitled volume 1, I presume there will be more to come from Mathieu and the Paradis family, and that will indeed be 'heavenly' for readers who enjoy this first in the series!

Thematic Links: Adventure; Mystery; Life After Death; Humour

Ann Ketcheson