

Picture Books

VICKERS, Henry Roy and Robert Budd

Raven Brings the Light

Harbour Publishing, 2013. 36p. Illus. Gr. 3-5. 978-1-55017-593-6. Hdbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

Raven Brings the Light is a story from the people of the Northwest Coast that has been passed from generation to generation for thousands of years. This is a retelling of the story as told to Henry Roy Vickers by Chester Bolton, Chief of the Ravens, from the village of Kitkatla around 1975.

At a time when the world was filled only with darkness, a young couple from Gwaii Haanas (which means the beautiful islands, now known as Haida Gwaii or the islands of the Haida) became parents to a special baby boy named Weget (which means big man).

Weget was so named because of the frighteningly fast speed with which he was growing. Only a baby, he already was walking. His parents approach the elders for guidance, and after looking upon Weget, they know he is the boy that their people have been waiting for for generations, the one destined to change the world by ending the darkness. Weget is given the magic raven skin that has been saved in a special cedar box for him. His parents are told he can put on the magical raven skin when he is big enough, and he will be granted the gift of flying and the ability to transform into anything he wishes. In time Weget turns into the raven and leaves Haida Gwaii for the sky, where he meets the Chief of the Heavens who keeps the light in a bent box.

After being denied the Daylight Ball outright, Weget must rely on trickery to fulfill his destiny and return with the light. Readers will enjoy guessing the tricks that Weget, the raven, employs as the events of the tale unfold.

The illustrations in this book are as beautiful as the story. Each full page work of art adds to the story in a way that is pure magic. This book would make a wonderful read aloud story for a wide range of age groups.

Thematic inks: First Nations; Legends

Moira Kirkpatrick

Fiction Grades 3-6

ROY, Philip

Me & Mr. Bell

Cape Breton University Press, 2013. 142p. Gr.4-7. 978-1-927492-55-0. Pbk. \$11.95

Rating: E

Young Eddie MacDonald excels in math, but is struggling to learn to read and write. Growing up on a farm near the village of Baddeck on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Eddie works hard at his farm chores, enjoys solving problems, especially if they are connected to math, but finds school very discouraging. The year is 1908 and quite by chance Eddie meets Alexander Graham Bell, who has built a large summer house in the area and loves to wander the neighbouring fields. Through casual conversations and several chance meetings, Mr. Bell becomes interested in Eddie's struggle to read and write, while at the same time admiring him for his inventive ideas and obvious math skills.

At this time Mr. Bell and his associates are struggling with plans to complete a manned biplane, and when Eddie is invited to visit, he is included in the discussions. Eddie becomes inspired by Mr. Bell's encouragement and learns not to give up, but to find solutions for his reading and writing challenges.

This inspiring and fast-paced novel should capture the interest of young readers both for its' historical information and its' dealings with reading and writing problems which many young students face. Not only does the novel conclude with the successful flight of the *Silver Dart*, but it also includes Eddie's meeting with Helen Keller and

references to Alexander Bell's work with many who had hearing and sight disabilities, including his own wife. Appropriately written for intermediate students, this novel provides many examples of individuals coping with challenges. It should provide excellent stimulus for classroom discussion and should be a popular addition to an elementary school library collection.

Thematic Links: Alexander Graham Bell; Inventions; Applied Mathematics (Pulleys, Levers, etc.); Learning Problems (Reading & Writing); Self-Esteem

Carolyn Cutt

Fiction Grades 7-12

BASS, Karen

Graffiti Knight

Pajama Press, 2013. 287p. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-927485-53-8. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

This notable fourth novel by Karen Bass should add an interesting dimension to the current fashion of dystrophic novels. It is based on real events from post-war Europe (1947 to be exact) in what is now East Germany. For my money, it has more drama than the *Hunger Games*.

The hero of the novel is a teenager in Leipzig, a broken city whose citizens live in fear of their new oppressors, with no hope of escape. Wilm is almost finished school and quite by accident finds himself waging a war of embarrassment against the German police he considers to be puppets of their Soviet masters. His campaign gains momentum and a shift in focus after he learns that his sister had been raped the year before by a group of Soviet soldiers when she had gone to the train station to meet her German soldier boyfriend. Wilm had idolized the boyfriend, who then joined the German police. Wilm sees the betrayal as doubly troubling.

In the midst of all this is the budding friendship between Wilm and a structural engineer who works for the Soviets, although not by choice. He mentors Wilm until Wilm strikes a compromising deal with the German police and the ex-boyfriend in an effort to save a close friend from imprisonment. Left to his own devices, Wilm commits one more act of defiance and lands all his friends and his family in trouble. The only escape is complete escape - to the Americans on the other side of the border with Czechoslovakia.

Five of them set out on a life or death path to hoped-for freedom, aware that the price will be steep and the journey treacherous. They are pursued by the ex-boyfriend who uses his professional resources in what is now a personal vendetta

Author Karen Bass and author Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch (*Making Bombs for Hitler, The Hunger, Last Airlift*) are cousins. Between them they have brought to life vital portraits of life before, during, and after war, regardless of locale or allegiance. By not resorting to fantasy to carry their work, they have done all of us a great service.

P. S. ***Graffiti Knight*** is a great title.

Thematic Links: World War II; Adolescence; Communism; Post-war Germany; The Cold War; Rape; Civil Disobedience

Lesley Little

Non-Fiction K-6

PELLETIER, Mia

Avati: Discovering Arctic Ecology

Illustrated by Sara Otterstätter. Inhabit Media, 2012. 46p. Illus. Gr. 3-6. 978-1-927095-13-3. Hdbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

The author defines Avati, which means environment, as the part of the world that lies above the treeline. This book focuses on the animals and plants found in Nunavut throughout the seasons. Whether under the water, on the cliffs, or along the shore, a variety of marine life, seabirds, and mammals must rely on the land, and each other, for food and shelter. Murres make nests on rock ledges, the ringed seals eat the Arctic cod that feast on amphipods, and eiders dive into the water to retrieve mussels. When the permafrost melts in the summer, the mosquito larvae grow. Caribou grow darker coats, and flower buds (like those on the Arctic poppy) seem to turn with the sun. Young are being raised, and fisherman catch Arctic char before they swim to wintering lakes. Autumn brings about seed dispersal by the ground squirrels and the weather changes to a light snow. The winter brings darkness, and colour change to many animals' fur, but there is still a lot of activity with animals such as the caribou, ravens and muskoxen foraging for food. Blubber protects the walrus from the cold, but some animals such as the polar bear and Arctic fox rely on the ice for their hunting grounds.

Pelletier, who has a background in ecology, has written a beautiful, informative book about the place she now calls home. Otterstätter's artwork shows the various ways plants and animals interact throughout the year. These colourful illustrations are both educational and interesting to view. Back material includes a seven page glossary, but no bibliography.

Thematic Links: Ecology; Arctic Regions; Environment; Animals and Plants; The Seasons

Tanya Boudreau

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

The Blackfoot Gallery Committee

The Story of the Blackfoot People - Niitsitapoosinni

Firefly Books, 2013. 104p. Illus. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-77085-181-8. Pbk. \$19.95

Rating: E

The Story of the Blackfoot People – Niitsitapiisinni is a cultural project that brings together leaders of the Blackfoot community and the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. The book describes the unique way of life exhibited by the Blackfoot people and the rich cultural tradition of their past and how those past elements must take priority over the lure of Western society.

The book is in many ways a visual journey, as the images chosen do an excellent job of granting the reader a sense of natural majesty and pride. The text that accompanies the images plays off their natural significance and constantly references spiritual themes which are drawn from sacred rites, oral stories and belief systems. The Sacred Bundles given to their ancestors by the *naa-to-yi-ta-piiksi* or Spirit Beings, for instance, are meant to firmly tie the Blackfoot people to their unique traditions. This tradition is one that honours the values of respect, cooperation and kindness. A special emphasis is placed upon the wisdom of elders, who are to be admired for their resourcefulness. In this way the book should be an excellent guide for youngsters, as it very simply describes the importance of Blackfoot values that could so easily be transformed into our own.

The book makes it very clear that traditional Blackfoot life is incompatible with the detrimental affects of modern life. For the Blackfoot People that wish to maintain their traditions, this book should be an important cultural journey. It will take the individual back into a period where his or her ancestors lived a remarkable existence, and furthermore it should reaffirm that the proud spirituality and vibrant culture of their past is not to be recognized as merely a latent phase to be assimilated into modern society, but a truly unique and vibrant institution that must honour tradition on its own terms.

Thematic Links: Aboriginal/Native history; Blackfoot People; Niitsitapiisinni; Canadian History; American Native History; Culture; Textiles; Traditions; Calgary; Glenbow Museum

Zachary G. Chauvin

Professional Resources

SYKES, Judith A.

Conducting Action Research To Evaluate Your School Library
Libraries Unlimited, 2013. 118p. 978-1-61069-077-5. Pbk. \$40.00

Rating: E

“Teacher-librarians today may find themselves in a variety of precarious positions. They are either at the leading edge of innovative educational pedagogy in their schools or districts; or they are fighting for their programs and positions.” (p. ix) Economic realities, technological changes, and even the nature of librarianship have contributed to the current status quo. However, the critical importance of the school library to student learning is being highlighted by the transformation of many libraries into learning commons. This transformation not only requires a radical shift in school culture, but it also promotes collaborative inquiry, pedagogical change and a movement to professional learning communities.

Judith Sykes, a former teacher-librarian, principal and school library services manager for the Ministry of Education in Alberta, explores the process of conducting action research to promote the importance of school libraries.

Conducting Action Research to Evaluate Your School Library is divided into three parts. Part I explores how teacher-librarians can determine the issues impacting their libraries by creating questions and mind maps, examining educational research, determining research goals and outcomes, and reflecting on future directions to explore. Part II gives readers some actual action research templates to examine their work spaces. And finally in Part III, Sykes outlines potential future areas of exploration as well as examples of successful projects.

This text provides an excellent learning tool to help teacher researchers structure their action research projects within the school library environment. Not only does Sykes give definitions of the terminology associated with action research, but she also includes a number of very practical and useful templates as well as numerous examples of topics to explore and successful action research projects. An extensive bibliography is also provided.

This text will become a vital tool for teacher-librarians new to action research, as well as a useful reference tool for experienced teacher-librarians who are seeking new and innovative ways to enhance their school library environments. Sykes has provided teacher-librarians with a wonderful tool to strengthen and enhance their school library programs. “The things which are most important to us are the hardest to measure.” (McBeath, 1999) (p. ix)

Thematic Links: Action Research; School Libraries; Role of the Teacher-Librarian; Technology; Learning Commons

Myra Junyk

French Resources

CARRIER, Roch

Après une nuit tristement folle (Collection: Zones de turbulences)
Éditions Mediaspaul, 2013. 96p. G. 7-12. 978-2-89420-880-9. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

Camille Duparc, the top student in her class, spent the night with Jonathan Poisson, a guy in her class whose main ambition is to perform new tricks on his skateboard. Camille takes a morning-after pill, sure that the medication will keep her from becoming pregnant. When this doesn't work, she has some major decisions to make.

Roch Carrier presents real-life teenagers confronted with a problem which happens all too often. Camille undergoes

a variety of emotions throughout the novel and considers the options of abortion, adoption or keeping the child. Does she even want Jonathan to know what has happened? How will she tell her parents that instead of her planned university education, she will be a teen mom? Carrier lets readers watch Camille as she goes through all of this confusion yet he never insists that any particular option is the 'right' one.

The feelings of the teen father also play a role in the novel and give an interesting and different viewpoint. Is Jonathan really just a skateboarder with his cap on backwards or can he take responsibility for his actions? Will the fact that he never knew his own father play a role in his decision?

This is an excellent short novel which delves into the emotions of both partners, as well as Camille's parents. Carrier talks about the freedom of choice regarding teen pregnancy as well as the responsibilities involved. Interestingly, nothing is truly decided at the end, leaving many options open and letting readers imagine what will happen to these characters with whom they have become involved. Perhaps Carrier will provide a sequel!

Thematic Links: Teen pregnancy

Ann Ketcheson