

Resource Links Excerpts
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Picture Books

BAILEY, Linda

When Santa Was A Baby

Illustrated by Geneviève Godbout. Tundra Books, 2015. Unp. Illus. Gr. Preschool - 2. 978-1-77049-556-2. Hdbk. \$19.99

Rating: E

The first thing that strikes one about *When Santa Was a Baby* is Geneviève Goudbout's clever artistic style, which replicates the wrapping paper and illustration of Christmases in the 1960s and 1970s. The muted autumnal pastel drawings, the pencil-crayon poinsettias against the moss green background, the red button noses and shiny apple cheeks of the characters: all these speak of a heartwarming nostalgia that is reinforced by the story.

Linda Bailey's Santa is a normal little boy... except for his booking baby voice, and maybe his love of red over every other colour, and perhaps his propensity for re-wrapping his birthday presents... Things begin to become clearer to the reader when he harnesses his hamsters to a matchbox to pull around the house. Part of the joy for the young reader will be that Santa's parents still haven't figured it out. "Extraordinary!" his father proclaims; "He's so creative!" coos his mother. "Don't they get it?!" the young reader will ask in an exasperated, or perhaps superior, voice.

Bailey's humour is giggle-inducing and sustained throughout the story; allusions to perhaps the most famous Santa poem - *A Visit from St. Nicholas* - are subtle and effective. The story is all wrapped up neatly in the end, when Santa's parents comment, with a revisionist view of his youth, "That's what we always *thought* he'd do ... We *knew* it all the time." And Santa replies "HO HO HO!"

Thematic Links: Santa Claus; A Visit From St. Nicholas; Christmas Traditions

Karyn Huenemann

Fiction Grades 3-6

STEVENSON, Robin

The Summer We Saved the Bees

Orca Book Publishers. 2015. 227p. Gr. 4-8. 978-1-459808348. Pbk. \$9.95

Rating: E

Wolf is a twelve year old boy who lives with his mother, step-father, older step-sister, and his 5-year-old half sisters, who are twins. Wolf's family lives a very alternative lifestyle, attempting to leave as little an environmental footprint as possible. Wolf does a project for school about the collapse of bee colonies and the effect that will have on crops around the globe, as bees are no longer able to pollinate to perpetuate our food sources. Wolf's mother takes on the bee issue as her new pet project. They give up their house and put all of their belongings in storage, to hit the road and travel across Canada to raise awareness through public presentations at various cities. They are going to live in a van and a tent camping out in the driveways of people kind enough to allow their family to stay. Wolf recognizes the importance of what his mother is trying to accomplish but he has misgivings about the methods she wishes to employ. Things start to go downhill immediately after Wolf's

mother decides to pull the kids out of school early to start her road trip. Wolf is increasingly upset as things go awry with his family members, with his older sister talking about running away as she cannot cope with the lifestyle her parents have chosen, to Wolf's younger sister, one of the twins, who has taken to no longer speaking. Wolf needs to find a way to get his mother to listen to him seriously regarding his concerns for himself and the direction their family is going.

This book is well written, but despite its easy reading, the topics are of a more mature nature that will be better appreciated by an older audience. This book deals with standing up for what you feel is right, when faced with a difficult situation, especially when it may be a person of authority that you need to stand up to. It also demonstrates how to deal with a situation in a mature fashion, and that it sometimes takes a daring move to get people to listen to you. *The Summer We Saved the Bees* also deals with current environmental issues that need to be addressed. These topics can all be used for educational discussions.

Thematic Links: Environment; Bees; Family; Activism

Emma-Leigh Mitchell

TAEKEMA, Sylvia

Ripple Effect

Orca Book Publishers, 2015. 130p. Gr. 3-6. 978-1-459808720. Pbk. \$9.95

Rating: E

At the beginning of summer Dana's best friend, Janelle, gets into a serious accident and spends all summer in the hospital. Dana misses her friend, but hates hospitals, so after a few failed attempts to visit Janelle in the hospital, Dana finds excuses to stop going - Janelle needs rest, or her parents aren't available to drive her there. Dana hopes to pick up where they left off once school starts and Janelle is out of the hospital, but she finds herself replaced by another girl in the class who has visited Janelle all throughout her hospital stay. Dana feels guilty about not visiting Janelle while she was in the hospital, but is unsure on how to reconnect with her friend, now that they are doing such

Fiction Grades 7-12

LEZNOFF, Glenda

Heartache and Other Natural Shocks

Tundra Books, 2015. 384p. Gr. 10-12. 978-1-77049-8365. Hdbk. \$21.99

Rating: E

About thirty-five pages into this book I thought I would be skimming it...predictable story line and predictable characters. And then...wham - I was completely involved with this page turner. Instead of predictable, the characters were nuanced and the story honest. I was hooked!

Though the story takes place during the political turmoil of the FLQ and 1970s Montreal and Toronto, it feels refreshingly current. The narrative is told through the eyes of two main characters - Julia, known as Jules, and Carla (with chapter headings denoting the perspective). These two young women are strong and passionate, with seemingly opposing viewpoints, but both interested in trouble - known as Ian Slater. With Jules being the object of greater depth and a more complete storyline, we are involved in her feelings of displacement and abandonment as she deals with the move from her happy and whole life in Montreal to her much lonelier life in Toronto. While her dad stays in Montreal to sell their home and family business, intelligent Jules copes with her mom and younger brother in their rental home and new highschool. Brash, crass and in your face, Carla seems the opposite to introspective Jules. However, both teens are interested in the theatre and, when their grade 11 drama class focuses

on *Hamlet*, they both see their lives reflected in the characters and words of the play.

With a style that felt fresh, Leznoff's writing will appeal to the reader who likes a young adult read, but wants something with more depth. Sure there is romance and rivalry, sex, sarcasm and plenty of f-bombs, but there is so much more. There are stereotypes that we get to know, situations that surprise and a tender look at families and friendship. While some readers may not understand or appreciate the leaning on the words of *Hamlet* in the novel's second half, others will feel closer to the characters of both this modern story and of one told over four hundred years ago.

From the viewpoint of someone who went from the thought of skimming this mature novel to staying up to the wee hours to finish it, I would highly recommend this thoughtful read!

Thematic Links: Friendship; Family Relationships; Displacement; 1970s English-French Relations - Canada; Coming of Age; Sexuality

Sarah Nelson

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

COHEN-JANCA, Irene

Mister Doctor: Janusz Korczak & the Orphans of the Warsaw Ghetto

Illustrated by Maurizio A. C. Quarello. Annick Press, 2015. 64p. Illus. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-55451-715-2. Hdbk. \$24.95

Rating: G/E

Mister Doctor tells the story of a noble and courageous man who believed in social justice and living with dignity even in the most horrendous and heart breaking conditions as suffered by the Jewish people during the Nazi reign of terror of World War II. Janusz Korczak cared for a group of Jewish orphans and put his life in danger in an attempt to save theirs. The story, told from the point of view of one of the orphans, describes the horrible living conditions the children were made to suffer and of the kindness and selflessness Mister Doctor displayed in trying to tend the orphans and protecting them from harm. The brown illustrations demonstrate the darkness of living in a ghetto under the reign of the Nazi regime and the horrible and brutal life the Jewish people suffered. The book also includes a short biography of Janusz Korczak.

The book has a place as a curriculum resource for teaching about social injustice, life of Jewish people during World War II under the German Nazi regime. It is an excellent discussion tool and useful as a springboard for research. Recommended as a classroom resource, also for the school library.

Thematic Links: World War II; Holocaust; Jewish Orphans

Sharon Armstrong

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

HARRIS, Carolyn

Magna Carta and Its Gifts to Canada

Dundurn Press, 2015. 128p. Illus. Gr 9-12. 978-1-45973-112-7. Pbk. \$24.99

Rating: E

2015 marks the 800th year anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta and this approachable book by Dr.

Carolyn Harris is an excellent resource for anyone interested in its fascinating history.

Lavishly illustrated throughout, Dr. Harris gives a well-rounded history of the document and its creation and guiding principles. She explains the impact of the document right through to seeing it as a basis of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Of particular interest to students may be the importance of the Magna Carta in Canada's history through to the present day. As well, Dr. Harris looks at the impact of it on the American and French Revolutions.

Besides the labeled pictures, there are also helpful full and part page links (in a white font on brown) to related information, often dealing with the world at the time, people, and popular culture. These sidebars give interesting and focused information. The full-colour visuals include reproductions of text, drawings and art work, illuminations and photographs. The Appendices include information on the venues that the Magna Carta will be displayed in in 2015 and Durham Cathedral (where three of the four copies are housed). As well, there is a helpful reading list provided. All of these add greatly to the reader's understanding of this document and its role in the shaping of democracy.

I had little idea of the true significance and depth of the Magna Carta. I understood it only on a very superficial level. With the help of this extremely well written and relatable book, I have a greater understanding of the impact this document has had, both historically and to the present day.

Highly recommended for both school and public libraries.

Thematic Links: Medieval England; Democracy; Creation of Laws and Societal Codes; Impact of the Magna Carta on Canada and beyond

Sarah Nelson

Professional Materials

DZALDOV, Brenda Stein

Ready, Set, Learn: Integrating Powerful Learning Skills and Strategies into Daily Instruction

Pembroke Publishers, 2015. 111p. 978-1-55138-302-6. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: G

“Knowing how to learn - being organized, knowing how to communicate, knowing how to collaborate, knowing how to self-regulate, set goals and persevere toward them, and being able to strategize for learning is essential to knowing and understanding the content.” (p. 7) Some students come to school with these learning skills; however, many students have not acquired them before arriving at school for the first time. In ***Ready, Set, Learn***, Brenda Stein Dzaldov explains how to teach students specific learning skills and how to plan lessons to support these learning skills.

This book is organized into seven chapters outlining the importance of learning skills and strategies. The first chapter, “Learning Skills and Preferences,” examines the differences between the concepts of learning goals, learning skills, learning strategies and work habits. Teachers are encouraged to list not only the learning goals of a lesson or unit, but also the learning skills involved. This information should be shared with students before learning begins, and a Goal Tracking Chart can be used to indicate student success in achieving learning goals as well as learning skills. Descriptive feedback is an important element of this process. The second chapter, “Teaching Learning Skills and Strategies,” outlines specific skills to be taught and provides suggestions and lessons to teach them. Chapters 3-6 focus on teaching the skills of organization, collaboration, initiative and memory. The final chapter explains how to evaluate learning skills and provides extensive rubrics.

Ready, Set, Learn is a good resource which provides realistic suggestions for teaching learning skills. There are numerous sample lessons, charts, checklists, graphic organizers and rubrics. It is a good resource for both new and experienced teachers who might struggle with teaching and evaluating learning skills and strategies. These learning skills are critical for learning as Alvin Toffler suggests, *“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those*

who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.” (p. 8)

Thematic Links: Learning Skills; Learning Strategies; Organization; Collaboration; Initiative; Memory; Evaluation

Myra Junyk

French Materials

ARSENAULT, Angèle, Marie-France Comeau and Marie Cadieux

Le Pit à Papa

Illustrations by Jean-Luc Trudel. Bouton d'Or Acadie, 2015. 23p. Illus. Gr. K-3. 978-289-6820-832. Pbk. \$9.95

Rating: E

This charming picture book biography recounts the early childhood of “Petites Lunettes” or, as she was known in real life, Acadian singer/songwriter Angèle Arsenault. Perhaps better known to the grandparents of today’s young readers, Arsenault was a world-renowned singer, songwriter, author and TV personality most prolific in the 1970s and 80s. Recipient of the Order of Canada and many industry awards, her 1977 album *Libre*, for example, went triple platinum.

However, *Le Pit à Papa* is not about Arsenault’s adult career, but rather her childhood on Prince Edward Island and the influence her family played in her early life. In luminous two-page spreads that jump from one warm scene to another, the reader is easily able to cobble together the sense of love, inspiration and solid upbringing that launched “L’Étoile de l’Île-du-Prince-Édouard” on her way. From building sandcastles on the beach with her father, through her father working on a neighbour’s car in the titular “pit à chars” (colloquial regional term for an automotive repair pit), to the bustling family dinner at a table set for twenty (Angèle was the eighth child out of fourteen), we see a way of life that is at once nostalgic and yet somehow familiar. Eventually, we see “Petites Lunettes” all grown up and riding away from the island on the ferry to follow her dreams. The last double page spread shows a new generation playing in the sand, with Angèle (who passed away in 2014), guitar in hand, and her father riding together in a “char” toward the heavens.

The language in this text is rich, full of metaphor and regionalisms. It evokes the time and place of the story perfectly. For example, when her mother is encouraging Angèle to open her first bank account in her own name as a young woman, she says, “*Ton sourire vaut de l’or. Et surtout, tes rimes et tes chansons. Ça va te faire une belle couverture piquée pour t’abrier. Bonne ou mauvaise saison, Petites Lunettes, ce sera ta moisson.*”

Based on a manuscript for teens that Angèle Arsenault herself submitted to the publisher in 2013 about her father’s love of cars, this picture book text is adapted by Marie-France Comeau and Marie Cadieux. It is a wonderful introduction to the prolific and much-loved “Étoile” for a new generation of readers.

Thematic Links: Biography; Prince Edward Island; Family Life

Ashley Nunn-Smith, Youth Collections Development Librarian, Halifax Public Libraries