

Resource Links Excerpts
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Picture Books

DUPUIS, Jenny Kay & Kathy Kacer

I Am Not a Number

Second Story Press, 2016. Unp. Illus. Gr. 2-5. 978-1-927583944. Hdbk. \$18.95

Rating: E

Based on a true story of the author's grandmother, *I Am Not a Number* is an essential retelling of a year in a young girl's life in an Ontario residential school.

In 1928, Irene and two of her brothers were taken from their family, and forced to move to a residential school run by nuns, where they would be shamed into renouncing everything about their Ojibway heritage. As she was leaving, Irene's parents pleaded with her not to forget who she is and where she came from. Although she suffered from neglect and abuse at the hands of the nuns, Irene's spirit persevered and she was able to keep her promise to remember her truth. She was fortunate enough, as few were, to have a family who were willing to fight to keep her out of the school, hiding the children away when it was time to return for their second year. However, the memory of her single year in the school was haunting enough to stay with Irene, and be passed down to her granddaughter, who very eloquently wove it into this remarkable story.

Of special note is the author's ability to portray the devastating environment that Irene lived in, in a heartfelt and authentic way that is very much appropriate for the intended age. Children will no doubt have questions, and may struggle to comprehend the horror of the system, but most will not find the story too disturbing to get through.

As an important, albeit tragic, part of Canadian history, this story will resonate with teachers and students in a school setting as well. Few stories exist about the residential school system that are aimed at a younger age group, and this one is an absolute must for classrooms and libraries. An afterword about the system as well as one about Irene are included and, along with the story itself, will provide children and classrooms with a lot to think about.

Highly recommended.

Thematic Links: Residential Schools; First Nations People; Ojibway; Abuse; Family; Canadian History

Nicole Rowlinson

Fiction Grades 3-6

KRISHNASWAMI, Uma

Book Uncle and Me

Illustrated by Julianna Swaney. Groundwood Books, 2016. 152p. Gr. 3-6. 978-1-55498-808-2. Hdbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

Ever since she turned eight, Yasmin has read one book every day. Now she has read over four hundred books. Her reading habit is supported greatly by Book Uncle's Lending Library, a small corner lending library with a sign that says "Books. Free. Give One. Take One. Read-read-read." Book Uncle always has the right book for the right person, and Yasmin is his best patron. Out of the blue, the mayor decides that Book Uncle needs a permit, which he can't afford to pay for. This injustice inspires Yasmin to work with her friends Reeny and Anil to spread the word and make Book Uncle's Lending Library a political issue in the upcoming local elections. Can Yasmin and her friends make a difference in their community, even though they are just kids? Will either of the candidates for mayor even listen to them?

Book Uncle and Me introduces readers to the topics of community activism and local politics through Yasmin's adventure. The Indian setting, the inclusion of some words in Hindi, and the unique voice of Yasmin contribute to

this well-written story. This book will hopefully encourage readers to stand up for what they believe in and recognize that even though they are too young to vote, they can still make a difference in their communities.

Thematic Links: Lending Libraries; Reading; Community Activism; Politics; Elections

Alice Albarda

Fiction Grades 7-12

BOYNE, John

The Boy at the Top of the Mountain

Doubleday Canada 2016. 224p. Gr. 5 up. 978-0-3851-68766-9. Hdbk. \$22.99

Rating: E

The Boy at the Top of the Mountain is a small tour de force by Irish author John Boyne who brought the world of children's lit, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. The boy at the top of the mountain is Pierrot/Pieter who through no intent or will of his own finds himself at age eight living with Adolph Hitler at "Berghof" where the Fuhrer maintains a summer retreat near Salzburg in Austria.

Boyne sets the stage for this terribly dark story when young Pierrot is about seven and living in Paris with his French mother and German father who has been deeply traumatized as a German soldier in The Great War. His best friend in Paris is a young deaf Jewish child called Anshel.

Pierrot's life begins to deteriorate when his father disappears in an alcoholic haze and his mother dies of consumption. Pierrot is orphaned and sent to an orphanage in Southern France. He is happy enough there but events conspire to have him join his father's long lost sister, Beatrix, who is a housekeeper at Berghof and who has received permission from Hitler to bring him to live at Berghof.

At Berghof, Pierrot's transformation to Pieter ensues and his story becomes synonymous with the rise of Hitler and Nazi Party in Germany during the 1930's. Pieter totally absorbs the Fuhrer's vision for the Fatherland and becomes deeply committed to the cause. The tale becomes dark and disturbing and the reader is drawn into a world of power and betrayal. To keep the tension high, Boyne slyly incorporates well known Nazi personnel and accurate personal history about Hitler himself. Boyne never shies away from the worst known Nazi activities in any way, and personally pulls Pieter into these atrocities.

If the book has any obvious shortcomings, it may be that the set-up to the story is strangely awkward and in some ways unconvincing, especially the friendship between Anshel and Pierrot. In the fullness of the narrative, the reader does discover why the plot was constructed in the way it was. As this is a book written for children and young adults, Boyne needed a way to provide some kind of redemption to Pierrot, and to complete the story in a satisfactory way.

This is minor quibble, however, and ***The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*** is highly recommended for readers of all ages.

Thematic Links: World War II; Adolph Hitler; Nazis

Anne Letain

Non-Fiction K-6

MCLAUGHLIN, Danielle

That's Not Fair: Getting to Know Your Rights and Freedoms (CitizenKids Series)

Illustrated by Dharmali Patel. Kids Can Press, 2016. 44p. Illus. Gr. 2-6. 978-1-771382083. Hdbk. \$18.95

Rating: G

Councillor Bug protests with the familiar phrase “That’s not fair” when the mayor introduces six different motions to council. Each chapter looks at the pros and cons of each idea such as privacy rights, right of religion, right of assembly etc. After each chapter is a short list of questions for discussion. What was the intent of the law? Did it work? And were there any unexpected results?

This could be a great resource for government studies or even for classroom or household management. Each law is well intentioned, but any law puts limits on the freedom of some individuals

The author is the Director of Education for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Education Trust. The book is one of the *CitizenKids Series* from Kids Can Press, which encourage children to explore the more complex issues of rights and privileges of citizenship.

Thematic Links: Government; Rights and Freedoms

Mavis Holder

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

SPRAY, John

Next Round: A Young Athlete’s Journey to Gold

Pajama Press, 2016. 112p. Illus. Gr. 6-9. 978-1-77278-003-1. \$16.95

Rating: G/E

This is the true story of a young Chechen athlete who, at the age of 20, will represent Canada at the 2016 Olympics in Rio as a boxer.

Arthur Biyarlanov’s journey begins on a bridge, where, at the age of three, he witnesses his grandmother and siblings being fired upon by Russian troops nervous that, as Muslims, these Chechens might be armed with explosives. By the time Arthur and his siblings reach their father in Azerbaijan, they are refugees. After his father’s death, Arthur and his family face further hardship, deciding to move to Canada in search of a better life.

Life in Canada is somewhat of an improvement but the gritty athleticism and combative nature Arthur developed in Azerbaijan serves him well in Toronto’s Jamestown. His skill in soccer helps him win friends and to learn English in a neighbourhood filled with countless foreign languages.

Arthur plays soccer for seven years and leads his team to a U.S.A. cup victory but a broken leg mid-way through his soccer career gives him pause and time to consider other sports. Boxing finally wins the day. Arthur also finds a mentor/trainer in Danny Santagato. Danny teaches Arthur how to fight using his brain rather than his temper. The next round - the Olympics - will show how successful this story will be.

Author John Spray is no stranger to either writing or boxing. He sponsors a mystery writing award and has been involved with boxing for most of this life.

Thematic Links: Boxing; Family Life; Refugees; Soccer; Chechnya; Azerbaijan

Lesley Little

Audio-Visual Materials

An Introduction to First Nations Culture & Traditions

McIntyre Media, 2015. 27 min. PDF resource guide. Gr. 3-8. Educator’s Package \$179.00

Rating: A

This DVD and its accompanying resource guide provide an introduction to the regalia, dance, drumming, food, environmental connection, and pow wows of First Nations communities. The teenaged host, Cedar Smoke,

introduces each of these topics, followed by an interview with a member of a First Nations community who explains the topic further.

While Cedar Smoke's segments aren't always well integrated into the video, the interviews are very interesting. The interviews and the shots of dancing, drumming, and singing are the highlights of the video because they provide clear explanations and vibrant examples of each of the topics covered. However, these shots are often mixed in with stock footage and transitional animations which bring down the quality of the video somewhat.

Despite some of the flaws in the production of this video, there is a good range of topics covered. The video, along with the additional information provided in the resource guide, would be well-suited for inclusion in an elementary or middle school social studies classroom as a general introduction to First Nations traditions.

Thematic Links: First Nations Culture; Pow Wows; Canadian Culture

Alice Albarda

Professional Materials

FIORE, Mary and Maria Luisa Lebar

The Four Roles of the Numerate Learner: Effective Teaching and Assessment Strategies to Help Students Think Differently About Mathematics

Pembroke Publishers, 2016. 96p. 9781-55138-3118. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

The Four Roles of the Numerate Learner by Mary Fiore and Maria Luisa Lebar promotes, "a new way of thinking about mathematics and a new way of doing mathematics." The writers have based their resource on current research on teaching mathematics as well as models created by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Their approach relies heavily on the connections between literacy and numeracy, as their definition of numeracy suggests, "*To become numerate, students must learn to make sense of the mathematics, use mathematical skills effectively, thoughtfully communicate mathematical thinking, and critically interpret mathematical knowledge and skills.*" (p. 10)

This resource is divided into six chapters which provide an outline of the four roles in the framework and discuss topics such as: critical thinking, mathematical thinking skills, rich mathematics tasks, and assessment. The first chapter explains the connections between literacy and numeracy in great detail and describes mathematical thinking. The next four chapters address each of the four roles in detail: Sense Maker, Skill User, Thought Communicator and Critical Interpreter. Each chapter defines the role and focuses on numerous examples at various grade levels. Chapter 2, "Sense Maker" explains the use of rich tasks to develop mathematical thinking and explains the use of effective questioning. In each chapter, there is specific reference to assessment tasks to promote effective learning. The final chapter, "Moving Forward" addresses the links between teaching and learning as well as using the framework as a professional development tool to support, "*collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, creativity, and citizenship.*" (p. 81)

Mary Fiore and Maria Luisa Lebar have written an extremely useful resource which can be used by new teachers and experienced teachers alike to improve their mathematics instruction. This book provides numerous examples of each role and gives clear and concise descriptions of how to address each role in the classroom environment. The links between literacy and numeracy instruction are also very explicit. This comprehensive resource can serve as a guide for planning, implementing improvements in mathematics instruction, as well as providing a useful tool to engage teachers about effective mathematics strategies. "*By adopting the **Four Roles of the Numerate Learner** framework, students will become skilled critical thinkers, thoughtful problem solvers, and reflective communicators.*" (p. 11)

Thematic Links: Numeracy; Mathematics Instruction; Assessment; Critical Thinking; Literacy Instruction

Myra Junyk

French Materials

CANCIANI, Katia

178 secondes

Les Éditions David, 2009. 270 p. Gr. 10-12. 978-2-895974536. Pbk. \$14.95

Rating: E

178 secondes will appeal to fans of road trip books, teenagers and adults alike. In the spirit of Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*, Katia Canciani combines a quest of self-discovery with cross-country travel and her love for aviation. Nicola, a CEGEP student who has grown up in a single-parent family in Montreal, has just turned 18 and is itching to get away from the familiar in order to discover his country, the English language, and most importantly, his identity.

As the narrative unfolds, readers begin to understand the complex events surrounding his birth that have resulted in the emotionally unsettled teen that is Nicola. Prior to departing on his cross-country tour, Nicola's friend Jade took him to a fortune-teller and reader of auras for a consultation. Although initially skeptical, this meeting had a profound effect on Nicola, leading him to uncover the deep secrets his family has hidden from him about his relationship with his mother and her very existence.

Nicola's voyage takes him from Montréal to Toronto and through to British Columbia, up to the Yukon and finally through the Maritime Provinces. Along the way, he meets many interesting people from across Canada who teach him, in various ways, about life. He learns that the francophone community outside of Québec is quite a bit larger than he previously thought. He learns how to be alone, who and what is important to him, and what his dreams are. He learns that despite having a mother who attempted to kill him as an infant, he has to live in the present and focus on what he has, rather than what he is lacking. He returns to Montréal a phoenix, rising from the ashes of his family's past and ready to tackle his life.

Canciani's creative writing style will enthrall readers of all ages. The narrative text is interspersed with Nicola's poetry, allowing readers to fully grasp his evolution as a character. The language complexity level should be considered advanced for French language learners.

Thematic Links: Road Trips; Aviation; Self-discovery

Samantha Read