

Picture Books

BLAND, Nick

Twinkle

Scholastic Canada, 2017. 32p. Illus. Gr. Preschool - 1. 978-1-4431-0098-4. Hdbk. \$14.99

Rating: E

Penny Pasketti longs for a friend; preferably a shiny, glowing one that lives in the night sky. When a star does fall in her backyard, she retrieves it and they become friends. After an evening of jumping on the bed and sharing secrets, Penny has to figure out a way to get the star back up in the sky. She tries to tie a balloon around his belly, and she wraps him up like a parcel with the address, The Sky, but, "Little Star was too heavy and the sky, too far away." In the background of the acrylic illustrations, the reader will see that Little Star wasn't the only star that fell to earth, and Penny wasn't the only child lucky enough to find a new friend. The book winds down with views of shooting stars going in the opposite direction from atop a skyscraper, and then an illustration of Penny back in her bed, but this time sleeping.

I wish I could give this book a rating higher than an E. It's an E+. The story and the illustrations are some of the best I have ever seen in my seventeen years of working in a library.

Thematic Links: Falling Star; Home; Friendship; Night Time; Secrets

Tanya Boudreau

Fiction Grades 3-6

ELLIS, Deborah

Sit

Groundwood Books, 2017. 144p. Gr. 4-8. 978-1-77306-086-6. Hdbk. \$14.95 (Reviewed from Advanced Reading Copy)

RATING: E

Sit is the newest book from acclaimed author Deborah Ellis, a very passionate advocate for the disadvantaged in society. Her social justice endeavours earned her a multitude of awards, including the *Governor General's Award*. This novel follows the social justice theme. *Sit* contains eleven chapters (stories) which draws the reader's attention to the lives of nine children; each child makes a decision and becomes passionate about that choice, often making life changing moments for each child. The common thread weaving the stories together is a child sitting at a chair. Each is powerful story on their own, but having them all in one book is very compelling.

Ellis doesn't hold anything back in her description of each story, often to the extent that the characters, children and especially the adults, can be painted in imperfect ways. Whether that character is dishonest, condescending, or just outright rude, the author makes the story more realistic as what could have happened to children in real life, not just characters in a book. The first character is Jafar, a child labourer, whose story begins and finishes the book; Jafar's dream is to attend school and he accomplishes his "decision" in a very distinct manner, showing that choices can be important even in the worst of conditions. The chapter titles for Jafar, "*The Singing Chair*" and "*The Hope Chair*" unite his story in a very meaningful way, his dreams and choices become one. "*The Glowing Chair*" portrays a story of courage, where the child makes a decision, acts on it, instead of just sitting and waiting for "things" to happen. Each story prompts genuine contemplation enabling readers to "think" about what they would have done. For me, as a reader, not a reviewer, the story which hit home the most was "*The Question Chair*"; the character

Gretchen wonders what she would have done if she lived during the time period of the story, the Holocaust. Not only does she wonder how it would have felt to be Jewish at that time, she also reverses her trend of thought into what would she have done as a German during that time; in addition she wonders and “questions” her parents about what the family may have done during the Holocaust as well. This story was vividly written because Ellis brought me back to Gretchen’s cities of Berlin and Krakow, cities I walked through during a March of the Living Educator’s Holocaust tour back in 2010. References to the toilets at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, to the Reichstag, to the Wannsee location and even to the Sachsenhausen camp nearby were as clear to me in 2017 as they were in 2010; Ellis’ attention to details enables readers to take those journeys whether for the first time, or a flashback to a lived event. Deborah Ellis has a unique way of bringing even sad periods and situations to life, researching the locations to provide accuracy and authenticity.

Once again Deborah Ellis does not disappoint. *Sit* is an eloquent collection of stories from one of Canada’s best storytellers. As with most of her works, Ellis brings the theme of social justice alive in her characters and their difficulties. Her young characters provide juvenile readers with a venue to question: “what if that was me”, as her audience can hence relate to others of the same age; children relate to other children. A worthy resource for classrooms (Grades 4-8) looking for material to spark discussions on many aspects of social injustice: Holocaust, child labour, radiation leakage, etc. *Sit* is a must for school and public libraries as well.

Thematic Links: Cultural Identity; Social Justice; Resilience; Making-a-Difference; Choices

Carmelita Cechetto-Shea

Fiction Grades 7-12

BURTINSHAW, Julie

Saying Good-bye to London

Second Story Press, 2017. 262p. Gr. 8-10. 978-1-77260-029-2. Pbk. \$12.95

Rating: E

Saying Good-bye to London is a hard-hitting yet sensitively written novel about teen pregnancy, told primarily from the perspective of fifteen-year-old Francis, a quiet boy whose first romance leads to a baby, an adoption, and a rapid transition to the responsibilities of adult life.

The novel spans a little more than a year. Francis meets Sawyer, their relationship blooms, and within a few months they’ve broken up over the news of Sawyer’s pregnancy. When Francis first learns that Sawyer is pregnant, he reacts very, very badly. It is only through the persistent direction of his friends that he starts to change his attitude. As such, readers are invited to grow with Francis - and with Sawyer. Although most of the time readers experience the story through Francis’s eyes, now and then the author lets readers slip into Sawyer’s point of view, as well as that of various other characters, lending a much broader view to the unfolding events. The plot never drags; the narration is direct and matter of fact, and it communicates without becoming preachy, a tone books about teen pregnancy sometimes adopt.

At its core, however, ***Saying Good-bye to London*** is a novel about fathers. Sawyer’s best friend, Jack, is homeless because his abusive father has thrown him out for being gay. At the same time, Francis’s best friend, Kevin, is living through the death of his father, who has been an important figure in Francis’s life. Francis and Sawyer both have complex relationships with their own fathers. Though boys may be reluctant to read a book apparently about pregnancy, this one offers some deep thinking about what it means to be a good man, what it means to be a father (rather than just a “sperm donor,” as Sawyer crisply comments), what it means to be a good partner.

This novel is likely to evoke strong responses. It would make an excellent selection for a teen reading group or as an independent novel study in grade nine or ten. Readers are sure to have opinions about Sawyer’s choice to have the baby, the process of private adoption, the couple selected to adopt baby London, and Francis’s treatment of Sawyer. Layers of complexity in the text will encourage conversation and reflection, and there are numerous themes readers can evaluate against their own morals and ethics. ***Saying Good-bye to London*** is a rewarding book on many levels.

Thematic Links: Pregnancy; Adoption; Families; Fathers; Vancouver

Leslie Vermeer

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

ESZTERHAS, Suzi

Moto and Me. My Year as a Wildcat's Foster Mom

Owlkids Books, 2017. 39p. Illus. Gr. 2-6. 978-1-77147-242-5. Hdbk. \$18.95

Rating: E

Moto, a *Severals*, which is a small, spotted wildcat, was only two weeks old when he was separated from his mother. Born on the Masai Mara's savanna in Kenya, Moto's story begins when he is picked up on the road by tourists on safari. Not realizing that they had startled Moto's mother who was rescuing her kittens from a grass fire, they drove the kitten to the ranger station, many hours away. Unable to be reunited with his mother, Moto is left in the care of author and wildlife photographer, Suzi Eszterhas, who agrees to teach him how to survive in the wild on his own. And so her challenging and fascinating story begins!

The first challenge was how and what to feed this baby wildcat, then how to keep him clean and healthy. Moto soon became curious about the world around him and was eager to explore. As he began to grow and mature, Moto learned to hunt small prey, mice, lizards, etc., as he roamed freely in the bush around the author's camp.

Instinctively, he also learned to protect himself, lying in the tall grass where his spotted coat blended with the surroundings. As Moto progresses towards independence and his return to the wild, the reader learns many fascinating details about *severals*, small wildcats, found on the savanna in Africa.

Lyrical written, the author shares her story and attachment to the baby several kitten with whom she became foster mother. The text includes a wealth of information about the wildcat's characteristics, habitat and environment.

Engaging photographs enhance each page, depicting both the emotional and bonding relationship between Moto and his foster mother, and adding further information for the reader. The final two-page spread contains factual information about *Severals* and a beautiful, full-page photograph. This fascinating book should capture readers of all ages and promote valuable discussion regarding wildlife rescue. It is highly recommended for school library collections.

Thematic Links: Severals (Wildcats); Wildlife Rescue; Kenya; Conservation; Foster Care of Animals; Wildlife Rehabilitation

Carolyn Cutt

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

WAGSTAFFE, Johanna

Fault Lines: Understanding the Power of Earthquakes

Orca Book Publishers, 2017. 96p. Gr 6-8. Illus. 978-1-4598-1243-7. Hdbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

When Johanna Wagstaffe was four, her family lived in Japan. She remembers regular earthquake drills in her kindergarten class and experienced a minor quake when she was playing with her dolls. Now a seismologist, Wagstaffe shares her extensive knowledge of earthquakes with young readers.

They'll be fascinated by the explanations of what goes on under the earth during an earthquake, and drawn in by the stories of young people around the world who have experienced a quake first-hand. What makes the book particularly interesting, however, is Wagstaffe's knowledge of the many earthquakes she has reported for CBC, and

frequent sidebars that provide information about specific quakes, including their magnitude, date, and location. Simple graphic art provides clear visual backup for the running text. Excellent photos show the aftermath of many quakes, and illustrate what many people do to prepare for them. The book ends with a list of websites and videos kids can check for additional information, as well as a full glossary and index.

This highly recommended title would be an ideal read for Junior and Intermediate level readers interested in this topic.

Thematic Links: Earthquakes; Natural Disasters; Emergency Preparedness; Tsunamis; Seismology; Meteorology; Plate Tectonics

Helen Mason

French

PELLETIER, Dominique

Traversons le Canada! (Je suis capable! Series)

Éditions Scholastic; 2017. 36p. Illus. Gr. 1-2. 978-1-4431-6019-3. Pbk. \$9.99

Rating: E

This instalment of the *Je suis capable! series* featuring characters Gustave and Olivia follows them as they travel across Canada. Beginning in the East and travelling West, readers follow the children's adventures as they visit each Canadian province. The book begins by depicting a map of Canada and each province is given a two page spread depicting notable attractions and features. Following the familiar format of the series, each page poses a question with the answer/reply *Je suis capable! (I can do it!)*. For example, on the New Brunswick page, the question posed *Pêcher le homard au Nouveau-Brunswick? (Go Lobster Fishing in New Brunswick?)* or further in the book *Monter à cheval en Saskatchewan? (Go horseback riding in Saskatchewan?)*. At the end of the book, the characters are quite proud of everything that they were able to do while visiting this great country.

This delightful book about Canada is a great way to introduce children to the geography and different cultural elements that make up this vast country. The simple vocabulary and colourful images make this an easy choice for parents and teachers of young children. The humorous elements in the pictures will captivate children while the educational value of the pictographs show what makes each region unique. This book serves as a wonderful addition to a great series of books and is sure to ignite curiosity and an appreciation of Canada. It would make a fantastic addition to a classroom or school library.

Thematic Links: Canada; Geography

Veronique Lavoie