

Resource Links Excerpts
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Picture Books

BECKER, Helaine

Little Jack Horner Live from the Corner

Illustrated by Mike Boldt. Scholastic Canada, 2012. 32p. Illus. Gr. Preschool - 2. 978-1-4431-1378-6. Pbk. \$7.99

Rating: E

In ***Little Jack Horner Live from the Corner*** not only does Jack come out of the corner, he also goes on stage. If that isn't nerve wracking enough, when he starts to sing, he is interrupted repeatedly by Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary. Children will have no trouble understanding the concept of 'contrary' by the end of this funny tale!

Jack is trying to sing 'Old MacDonald had a Farm' but Mary interrupts to tell him what has happened to each of the animals. For starters, Jack gets Old MacDonald, the farmer, and Bingo, the dog, mixed up! Each interruption is tied to a nursery rhyme or fairy tale. All the animals have left the farm. Where are they? Readers will notice that many of the farm animals are in the audience along with other nursery rhyme characters!

This jolly story is amusing. On the first page Humpty Dumpty is "...egging the crowd on." Mary's dialogue is hilarious. About the three little pigs she states "Oh those three moved out. They built a few houses and had some trouble with a wolf. But they're doing swell now. They're living together in that little brick home." About the Ugly Duckling she says "...she turned into a swan and headed off to Hollywood."

Mike Boldt's accompanying illustrations are fun too. (For the much older reader, Jack Horner looks somewhat like Buddy Holly!) The three little pigs are in the front row looking very prosperous and urbane. When the Ugly Duckling heads off to Hollywood she does so by taxi, passing a hitch hiking Puss in Boots. The Three Blind mice move around from audience to 'grooving' on-stage.

This book is highly recommended for both school and public libraries. With the witty dialogue and energetic illustrations it is a great book for story time. The inclusion of many nursery rhyme characters makes it a good book for individual contemplation as well as a welcome addition to a unit on Fairy Tales and Nursery Rhymes.

Thematic Links: Nursery Rhymes; Fairy Tales; Humour; *Old MacDonald had a Farm; Bingo the dog*

Laura Reilly

Fiction Grades 3-6

ROTSTEIN, Adira

Little Jane and the Nameless Isle

Dundurn Press, 2012. 260p. Gr. 5-8. 978-1459704206. Pbk. \$12.99

Rating: E

Little Jane and the Nameless Isle, the sequel to *Little Jane Silver* (2011), is a humorous, engaging story, replete with excellent historical research. It opens with short but dry relation by the narrator of how Little Jane (granddaughter of Robert Louis Stevenson's notorious Long John Silver) came to be in her current predicament, but once the initial narration ends, and Rotstein's characters begin to act out their lives for us, the story quickly grows into a "right riveting read."

Jane's parents and all their crew have been kidnapped by their friend-turned-enemy Captain Madsea, and Jane and four companions commandeer a ship and set out to rescue them. Jane's courage and determination are the driving force behind the success of their dangerous mission; her affection for her family and friends is the glue that binds the

team of seeming misfits together. Characteristics that seem out of pace for pirates, like affection and compassion, are justified in both the stories the characters' tell each other, and the narrative explanations of some of the back story (which is far more effectively woven into the narrative than the first few pages suggest). What I loved best about the book, though, was the subtle and seamless way in which the author introduces attitudes towards knowledge and learning. Jane loves books; her father loved reading, too, but - as they are pirates - books were a luxury they could ill afford, either financially or in terms of physical mobility. Jane's discovery of the magistrate's library is a wonderful accolade of reading that modern young readers would likely absorb without recognizing the important lesson they have imbibed. I particularly enjoyed Rotstein's wry humour and subtle allusions to classics of English literature - a footnoted reference to Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (p.196), and uncited comments such as "It is a truth universally acknowledged" (p.77), or "A hit ... a most palpable hit!" (p.138) - as well as to scientific discoveries such as antibiotics and binary numbers.

Little Jane and the Nameless Isle is a must for any elementary or middle school library: such a refreshing, clever book deserves to be shared.

Thematic Links: Pirates; *Treasure Island*; Historical Ships; Seamanships

Karyn Heuenmann

Fiction Grades 7-12

HARRIS, Michael.

Homo (SideStreets Series)

James Lorimer & Co., 2012. 142p. Gr. 9-12. 978-1-4594-0191-4. Pbk. \$9.95

Rating: E

Will is one of two out gay students in his Chilliwack high school. He doesn't fit in. He doesn't really get hassled much either though. He feels mostly invisible. In an effort to find out what life will be like when he leaves Chilliwack (that he won't is unthinkable,) Will makes regular trips into Vancouver. His first, which he credits as his official moment of coming out, is a dismal failure; he feels more alone than when home in Chilliwack. Through an online dating site, Will eventually finds someone who helps him with a less lonely introduction to urban gay life. He starts to feel part of a community. And then he discovers the unthinkable... his boyfriend has been hiding something huge. Will confronts the reality of his very first boyfriend having AIDS and with it, the enduring legacy of AIDS in the gay community.

Homo is a story about growing up that will strike a chord with many readers, gay or straight. Confronting the difficult realities of adulthood, shedding the protective coating of childhood, these are all experiences that speak to the teen reader.

Harris's writing is strong and adept; he ensures readability for the struggling reader without compromising the content of his story or quality of his prose. His writing is stark and realistic; though simple, it conveys a story of complex emotion.

Homo is an excellent choice for any library, school or public, of any size.

Thematic Links: LGBTQ; AIDS

Kimberley Bewick

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

STRUDWICK, Leslie

Inuit (World Cultures)

AV² by Weigl Educational Publishers, 2013. 32p. Gr. 4-7. 978-1-61913-092-0. Hdbk. \$24.99

Rating: E

Inuit is the latest updated resource to the *World Cultures*, Aboriginal non-fiction series. There are six titles in total: *Aboriginal Australians*, *Bushman of Southern Australia*, *Inuit*, *Maasai*, *Maori*, and *Polynesians*.

Colored photographs, maps and illustrations make this addition to the series visually appealing to the reader and complement the text. Captioned facts and photos in boxes adjacent to the text highlight relevant information. Similar to other books in the series, it first introduces the reader to the geographical location of the Inuit. Stories and legends of the culture, historical information, social structures and governance, language and cultural facts are then shared in clear, well-written text with the reader. The book also includes an informative timeline which marks historically significant events in the Inuit culture as well as a section on developing a debate topic relevant to the Inuit. Students can test their knowledge by accessing a brief quiz provided at the conclusion of the book.

Inuit is an excellent resource to access when teaching students how to utilize information texts. The book includes a Contents page, a Key Words section for defining bolded text found throughout the book and an Index for easy reference. There is also an AV2 component which offers an interactive experience online where readers can access videos, listen to audio uploads, view slide shows, take quizzes and browse links to various relevant websites. This book would be a great addition to an elementary or junior high library as an excellent resource for students learning about the Inuit.

Thematic Links: Social Studies; Cultural Studies; Aboriginals

Cynthia Smyth

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

OPATOWSKI, Felix

Gatehouse to Hell (The Azreili Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs)

The Azreili Foundation, 2012. 185p. Illus. Gr. 7-12. 978-1-897470-26-8. Pbk. Free

Rating: E

Gatehouse to Hell by Felix Opatowski is a stark memoir of the author as a young boy surviving the Holocaust. Opatowski goes into extreme detail on his day-to-day activity, as the misery around him seems unending. Early in the book, Opatowski mentions that he felt as though “he were on a different planet”, and given the sheer madness of such human catastrophe, it is easy to understand such a perceived notion.

Opatowski starts the book in his childhood, as a young Jewish boy living in Poland. A fateful decision made by his father keeps the family in the line of a Nazi advancement at the beginning of World War II, and all the family members are either killed or scattered across the continent. For a time he is sent to a brutal labour camp before being transferred to the dreaded Auschwitz, where the tragedy magnifies to unbelievable proportions.

Opatowski comes close to dying on a number of occasions. He even comes face to face with the infamous Josef Mengele. By mere chance he survives, while so many of those around him die from starvation, overwork or gassing. He nicely details the societal structures that managed to evolve out of such conditions, underground networks, hierarchies, resistance, etc. become part of his surprisingly dynamic world.

Gatehouse to Hell is an extremely important memoir, giving us a first hand account of an event in history we hope to never see repeated. While some of the scenes and descriptions are quite shocking, it would serve a young reader well to have those sorts of depictions reaffirm that mankind is capable of so much horror when the walls of racial discrimination arise.

Thematic Links: Holocaust; World War; Nazi Occupation; Poland; Labour Camps; Auschwitz

Zachary G. Chauvin

Audio-Visual Materials

Let's Talk Day: Teens and Depression

CTV/McIntyre Media Inc., 2012. DVD. 67 min. Grades 10-12. \$159.95 PPR

Rating: A

Let's Talk Day: Teens and Depression is a *Canada AM* special about teens and depression. Thus, this video is presented in a 'talk show' style with testimonials from teens scattered between segments and interviews. Audience Q and A is presented at the end of the film. In terms of information about depression and mental disorders in teenagers, it is adequate in presenting enough for a start. It gives the viewer tools and recommendations for directing a path for a fulfilling life. It also presents some very key points of information: there is no perfect solution to depression; everyone is different and so treatments will be different; and the most important: there is no one pill to cure it, and pills taken incorrectly can be fatally dangerous.

This video does the most important thing for the beginning stages of identifying and treating depression: opening up a discussion and telling the individual they are not alone. Using first hand reports in an interview style, it puts a real face to the problem. Talk therapy can be a very effective tool, as can listening to others recount their experiences, this is a double therapeutic tool for participants and viewers.

The major downfall to this video is the production quality and interest level. The talk show style was not very engaging and the audience was even less so. I completely understand that a good number of the audience members were made up of individuals with depression, but these people looked uninterested. From the starting title to the ending credits I just felt bored. I would be very hesitant in showing this to a classroom, as children and teens will become disengaged very quickly. For a television special, it was a good episode and some points were enjoyable. But for a stand-alone informational video, I hesitate to recommend it.

Thematic Links: Depression; Teens; Youth; Mental Disorders; Documentary

Michael Rogowski

Professional Materials

FOSTER, Graham

Ban the Book Report: Promoting Frequent and Enthusiastic Reading

Pembroke Publishers, 2012. 109p. 978-1-55138-264-7. Pbk. \$24.95

Rating: E

"It's time to ban the book report! As we encourage students to read extensively, let's provide them with reading-response options that are more personally significant, more motivational, more varied, and more interesting than book reports." (p. 5)

Graham Foster examines the alternatives to traditional book reports in his newest book entitled ***Ban the Book Report: Promoting Frequent and Enthusiastic Reading***.

This book began as a year-long professional development project in two Calgary schools. Teachers and students collaborated to expand the reading-response options available to students. At the end of the year, "Project teachers noted a significant increase in the amount of extensive reading completed by students in the two schools." (p. 105) The text is organized into three main sections: "The More Reading, the Better" explains the rationale, organization, logistics, and evaluation of the reading-response options presented in this text; "Motivational Reading-Response Assignments" gives teachers twenty reading-response templates, rubrics, completion forms and two exemplars of student responses for each template; and "Creating Your Own Reading-Response Assignments" outlines additional reading-response assignments created during a professional development activity at the end of the project.

Graham Foster provides numerous practical and classroom-tested resources to promote independent student reading. These assignments are meant to support their reading comprehension and enrich their lives by exposing them to the wonderful world of literature and informational texts. Foster's reading-response templates include various alternatives to the traditional book report such as reading logs, oral responses, written responses, graphic representations and assignments aimed at making connections. The templates, checklists and suggested sources will give teachers a myriad of ideas to use in their classrooms. This book provides a wonderful resource for both new and experienced teachers who want to "ban the book report" and provide their students with new reading-response options which "encourage rather than discourage reading." (p.5)

Thematic Links: Reading; Motivation; Library Collections; Book Reports; Oral Responses; Informational Texts

Myra Junyk

French Materials

GAGNON, Cécile and Emmanuelle Bergeron

Michel Sarrazin: Médecin et botaniste en Nouvelle-France (Bonjour l'histoire Series)

Éditions de l'Isatis, 2012. 69p. Illus. Gr. 4-8. 978-2-923234-85-4. Pbk. \$13.95

Rating: E

As a young man living in New France in the 1600's, Michel Sarrazin was fascinated by the plants and flowers which were unlike those in his native France. He also became friends with many natives and was quick to learn their ways of using plants to heal various illnesses. Eventually, Sarrazin became a medical doctor, treating patients with all types of injuries and diseases. His curiosity and love of the outdoors never left him and he continued to study the world around him and send valuable information about the new world back to his scientific colleagues in France. Sarrazin is widely considered to be the first Canadian scientist.

Gagnon and Bergeron have collaborated to tell the story of an important but little-known figure in Canadian history in this fifth book in the *Bonjour l'histoire Series*. Their story traces both Sarrazin's personal and professional life and gives readers insight into the practice of medicine in the 17th century. His contributions to the zoology and botany of the times were ground-breaking and a major development toward modern science.

The first 46 pages of the book are dedicated to the biography of Sarrazin. The final pages include a glossary and a list of Sarrazin's contemporaries. As well there are a few pages which describe medicine in the 17th century, including the types of diseases faced by settlers in New France and the various remedies used at the time. Michel Sarrazin is still remembered in modern Quebec and the final page of the book lists three ways his work has been commemorated. The illustrations by Sybiline (front cover) and Daniela Zekina add to the enjoyment and understanding of the text.

Thematic Links: Michel Sarrazin; History of Science and Medicine in Canada; Biography

Ann Ketcheson