

Excerpts
Resource Links v. 14, # 3
February 2009

Picture Books

MILLYARD, Anne

The Emperor's Second Hand Clothes

Illustrated by Josee Bisailon. Smith, Bonappetit & Son, 2007. 32 p. Illus. Gr. K-3.
978-1-897118-07-8. Pbk. \$10.95

Rating: E

The Emperor's Second Hand Clothes, a finalist for the 2008 Governor General's Literary Award for Illustration, is quirky and delightful in both text and artwork. The story is an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* first published in 1837.

Author Anne Millyard, founder of Annick Press, is no stranger to identifying what makes a book appealing to children. Her tale is perfect for a story time, guaranteed to prompt laughter from children and adults. The emperor still lives with Mom, has a minister of lost shoes and umbrellas, and is "a hard-working man" with a hobby: looking at himself in the mirror. When the emperor dresses for the parade he "...had asked for a motorcycle helmet, but the weavers had discreetly cautioned that motor bikes hadn't yet been invented." However, this emperor is a little wiser than the emperor of the classic tale. Because he asks himself "What if his subjects saw what he saw?" the tale has a different ending.

The illustrations invite readers to inspect and contemplate. Cutouts of outfits are juxtaposed with a variety of cats, dogs, horses in an assortment of scenes. Josee Bisailon uses a variety of techniques: collage, drawings and digital montage in each and every illustration! The eclectic mix enhances the text as it too is a blend of styles old and new.

This book is recommended for both public and school libraries. It is a great story to read to a group of children or for an individual to take home to peruse at leisure. The illustrations would be a splendid catalyst for creativity in the art class.

Thematic Links: Fairy Tales - Adaptation; Humour; Collage

Laura Reilly

Fiction Grades 3-6

SKRYPUCH, Marsha Forchuk.

Call Me Aram (New Beginnings Series)

Illustrated by Muriel Wood. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2009. 88p. Gr. 3-6.
978-1-55455-000-5. Pbk. \$16.95

Rating: E

"My name is Aram Davidian. And I am a Canadian."

Call Me Aram, sequel to *Aram's Choice* (2006), is a simple and heart-warming story of the orphan boys brought to Canada during the Armenian Genocide, following World War I. While the language is simple, author Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch neither oversimplifies nor romanticizes the psychological and cultural difficulties overcome by the orphans, who found themselves on a farm in Ontario, initially with no one who understood their language and culture. Based on historical fact, this story is powerful in teaching readers today of history, cross-cultural understanding, and charity. That which the boys find strange - ice boxes, wood stoves, porridge with cream - today's reader might easily find equally unfamiliar. Skrypuch's narrative voice, in explaining how Aram's culture differs from Canada, also reveals how 1923 Canada differs from our world today. There are many learning opportunities in this text; the depth to which the issues can be explored can be tailored to the age and maturity of the reading audience. The addition of the glossary and historical notes lends validity to the text, rendering it not only a beautiful tale, but an inspiring part of our national history.

Thematic Links: The Georgetown Boys; The Armenian Genocide; World War I

Karyn Huenemann

Fiction Grades 7-12

CARTER, Anne Laurel

The Shepherd's Granddaughter

Groundwood Books, 2008, 222p. Gr. 7up. 978-0-88899-902-3. Hdbk. \$17.95

Rating: E

Amani was born to be a shepherd. She refuses to go to school and only wants to follow her grandfather and learn to tend sheep. When Amani is finally granted the right to

become the next shepherd, she spends all of her time on Seedo's peak with her grandfather and the sheep, until the Israeli's begin to build a settlement ... on her land. Amani slowly loses more and more as the Israeli's occupy Palestinian land. It is fascinating to experience the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the eyes of a child. Amani's innocence, and inability to understand why is mixed with her fear and impotent rage at the situation. ***The Shepherd's Granddaughter*** makes the heart feel for a situation the brain has taken for granted exists. The characters are well developed and the plot progresses to enlighten the readers about the struggles, thoughts and fears of the average Palestinian. Highly recommended for everyone.

Thematic Links: Palestine; Palestinian - Israeli Conflict; Shepherds; Sheep Farming

Corinne Mathews

Non-Fiction Grades K-6

HORVATH, Polly

M is for Mountie: An RCMP Alphabet

Illustrated by Lorna Bennett. Sleeping Bear Press, 2008. Unp. Illus. Gr. 2 - 5.
978-1-58536-267-7. Hbk. \$19.95.

Rating: E

Multiple award-winner Horvath will be more familiar to readers of juvenile fiction, but her first foray into picture books is an absolute gem. ***M is for Mountie*** will have a ready audience due to its content alone, but Horvath's playful, rhyming text and Bennett's lush illustrations perfectly pair to create a title which covers the rich history and mission of one of the country's most beloved and recognised institutions in a tone and format which will be easily accessible to younger readers. Great effort is taken to highlight the fact that women have long played an important role in the force, although they only came on board as officers of the RCMP in 1974. Support, civilian and animal careers are also covered as is the complex role the RCMP play not only in law enforcement but also crime prevention. A solid pick for all collections; one of the best of the series.

Thematic Links: RCMP; Canada; Alphabet

Michelle Gowans

Non-Fiction Grades 7-12

WALTERS, Eric & Adrian Bradbury

When Elephants Fight: The Lives of Children in Conflict in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.

Orca Book Publishers, 2008. 90p. Gr. 5up. 978-1-55143-900-6. Hdbk. \$19.95.

Rating: E

As the ancient saying of the Kikuyu people of Kenya goes, ‘When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers’, implying that when there is fighting, it is the small - the weak, the poor, and children - who suffer the most. This outstanding book takes a look at five children around the world who live in conflict zones. Their lives have been changed forever by the conflict and war they have experienced.

The book opens with a foreword by Kim Phuc; the ‘girl in the photograph’ from the Vietnam War, who is now a Canadian citizen, and is one of the most famous children to be affected by a war situation. At the beginning of the book, Walters and Bradbury explain that although they have tried to present the information as objectively as possible, they do have bias; they are against war, and are distressed by the effect it has on children.

Each child featured tells their story of war. The book is illustrated throughout with good quality photographs, which accentuate the text. There are sidebars with basic information about each country showing key indicators such as income per capita and life expectancy. At the end of the personal story section, the authors offer a ‘follow-up’, and give the reader some information about what the child is doing now. Interestingly, three out of the five children featured are currently living in Canada. Each chapter continues with a more in-depth look at the conflict in that particular part of the world, and gives historical and religious context to the conflict, as well as considering the role that poverty plays in these areas.

This book is a recommended purchase for all middle and high school libraries. It is an interesting and powerful read that will appeal to the student interested in global issues, or anyone with an interest in children’s rights. In addition, it is a useful resource for students who are studying any of the conflicts covered, or those who are seeking more information about the effect of war on children. Half of the royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to GuluWalk (www.guluwalk.com), a charity that works with the children of Northern Uganda who continue to suffer from the consequences of war.

Thematic Links: Children and War

Claire Hazzard

Professional Resources

SPENCE, Christopher.

The Joys of Teaching Boys: Igniting Writing Experiences That Meet the Needs of all Students

Pembroke Publishers, 2008. 112 p. 978-1-55138-230-2. Pbk.\$24.95

Rating: G

Dr. Christopher M. Spence, educator, community advocate and Director of the

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, has been involved in various research initiatives and programs addressing the issue of boys' literacy. His introduction describes some of the issues that confront boys in our society: "In our society there is a tendency for boys to think that it's 'cool to be a fool' and that academic success is for 'geeks.' This perception is something to actively challenge." (p. 7) Spence goes on to explain how educators can address the challenges that face the boys in our classrooms. His approach is firmly based on research. The extensive bibliography provided at the end of this text will be useful to those who wish to pursue further research. Spence begins by outlining "The Way Boys Are" in his first chapter. He references key research and concludes that educators need to "support literacy across the curriculum, especially professional learning opportunities for teachers; provide short-term, challenging tasks and targets, with frequent changes of activity; and conduct regular personal interviews in order to set targets." (p. 17) He describes a survey of Grade 5 students in the Hamilton-Wentworth Board about writing habits which concluded that males were much more likely to be negative about their writing experiences. In the next chapter entitled "The Joys of Writing: Creating the Write Conditions," Spence outlines specific strategies to foster boys' writing including: focussing on paragraph writing and authentic writing events, outlining frameworks for writing, and encouraging written retellings and point-of-view writing. In subsequent chapters, Spence addresses other key issues: igniting writing in boys in the classroom setting, building higher expectations in boys to take literacy seriously, providing opportunities for boys to move in classrooms, explaining ways to handle attention-seeking behaviour, and promoting writing by boys through library initiatives, mentoring and parental involvement. The author has provided readers with several helpful strategies to improve the writing skills of boys in our classrooms. Particularly useful are his tip sheets on "How to Help Active Boys Thrive" and "Igniting the Writing at Home." In the end, Spence concludes that single-gender education should be reconsidered. "The idea of all-male classes and schools makes sense." (p. 84) His book is a useful tool in the growing body of literature on improving boys' literacy. Educators who wish to "help boys make the difficult transition to adulthood and become literate citizens along the way" (p. 95) will appreciate this book.

Thematic Links: Boys' Literacy; Writing; Reading; Classroom Management; Single-Gender Classrooms

Myra Junyk

French Materials

LAVOIE, Michel

Un trésor a Gatineau (Collection Girouette aventure)

Illustrated by Paul Roux. Vents d'ouest, 2008. 150p. Illus. Gr. 7-9. 978-2-89537-149-6. Pbk. \$9.95

Rating: E

When Frederic receives a letter which was mailed in 1945, he has no idea just where its' story might lead. It seems there is a significant treasure hidden somewhere in Gatineau but the writer of the letter has provided only minimal clues and it will take a true detective to follow them logically and find the fortune. Frederic is more than happy to give up his summer routine of mowing the lawn and helping around the house in order to set out on the treasure trail. He receives help from some unlikely sources and, in the end... well, you'll have to read the book to find out whether or not he succeeds! Young readers will enjoy the mystery and adventure in this novel, along with splashes of historical and local Gatineau colour. As well, they will be intrigued by Frederic and his friend - or is she, really? - Lydia, better known as 'the tornado'. The text is divided into 10 chapters plus an epilogue and also has a few brief notes on the historical places mentioned in the book, most of which can still be seen today. This would be an excellent addition to a school library and would entice readers of all kinds.

Thematic Links: Mystery; Treasure Hunt; Gatineau

Ann Ketcheson