



Monthly Booklist

December 2006

Maine Humanities Council staff picks

Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey. (1948)

Recommended by Trudy Hickey: On a summer day in Maine, a little girl and a bear cub wander away from their blueberry-picking mothers. Eating more blueberries than they pick, Sal and Little Bear each mistake the other's mother for her own. The illustrations justly earn their Caldecott Honor by conveying incredible suspense and expression through simple line drawings.

The Bremen Town Band by Brian Wildsmith. (1999)

Recommended by Deedee Schwartz: As I think back to the most beloved books I read to my young children and enjoyed myself, it's the ones with the beautiful illustrations that stand out the most. One of the stars is Brian Wildsmith. In his retelling of the Grimms' tale about animals setting off to become musicians after their owners reject them, he is true to the original story, yet his muted illustrations have a gentle touch appropriate for young readers.

The Classic Tales of Brer Rabbit collected by Joel Chandler Harris. Pictures by Don Daily. (2004)

Recommended by Denise Pendleton: This collection of seven folktales from the "Old Plantation," originally collected in 1880 by American newspaperman Joel Chandler Harris, have their roots in traditional African tales. The brief, informative introduction notes, "these stories aren't just about rabbits and foxes. These are stories about all of us." What I particularly like about these stories for sharing with my children is their celebration of wit, craftiness, and quick thinking over violence and physical prowess as the animals play tricks on each other, sometimes for the sheer fun of it and sometimes in a competition over resources.

Henry Hikes to Fitchburg by D.B. Johnson. (2000)

Recommended by Erik Jorgensen: One of a series of spectacular picture books based on the life and writings of Henry David Thoreau (depicted in these books as a lovable bear named Henry), this one interprets a story from *Walden* in which Thoreau and a friend both set out for Fitchburg, 30 miles west of Cambridge. Henry walks the whole way, while his friend does odd jobs to earn the money to get there on the afternoon train. Who will get there first? Who has the better trip? Lavish modernist-inspired illustrations include New England architecture, topography and wildlife.

The House at Pooh Corner by A.A. Milne (c. 1940)

Recommended by Tricia Hunt: My copy when I was a child was a large picture book accompanied by an old 78 RPM record narrated by that wonderful actor, Jimmy Stewart. You

followed the story in the book and heard a little bell when it was time to turn each page. I loved it so much and was very careful of the fragile record. My rough-and-tumble son, however, was not so careful. To protect the record, I dubbed the story onto a cassette tape for him. Many years ago, after my son had outgrown his interest in Pooh, I wrote a thank-you note to Jimmy Stewart telling him how much we had both enjoyed his record. To my surprise, I got a note back saying that he appreciated my letter and didn't realize anyone still knew about that old project.

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale by Mo Willems. (2005)

Recommended by Julia Walkling: When Dad unthinkingly throws his daughter's stuffed bunny into the wash at the Laundromat, a series of miscommunications leads Mom and Dad running back to retrieve him. This is my granddaughter Julia's current favorite (she's 3 1/2). Not long ago, a major tragedy occurred: her one-year-old sister Rebecca tore the title page a bit. Fortunately, Mommy (an ER doctor) was able to apply bandages!

Library Lion by Michelle Knudsen. Pictures by Kevin Hawkes. (2006)

Recommended by Joan Prouty: The first thing that attracted me to *Library Lion* was the cover illustration. As I wandered through the pages, the illustrations (by a Gorham artist) continued to make me smile. My grandson Sam began attending a weekly library story hour with several of his neighborhood pals this fall. I think each of them has had a *Library Lion* lesson during one or another of their visits! I knew Sam would relate to *Library Lion* learning the rules of the library. The first time Sam and I spent time with the book, we looked at and talked about the pictures. We speculated about the story. When we read the book aloud, we were both delighted to discover we already knew the story. It is a book we revisit often.

The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper. Pictures by Lois Lenski. (1930)

Recommended by Carolyn Sloan: As the oldest of six children, I must have read *The Little Engine That Could* a thousand times to my younger siblings. The plight of the “little” engine, the repetitive nature of the dialogue, and the rhythm of “I think I can” hold just as much fascination for 1- to 3-year-olds now as they did 30 years ago. For those who want a message, the power of taking on a challenge and doing for others is a far more important building block for self-esteem than praise. For those who like history, the old versions in the library will give your child a bit of the cultural history of trains.

The Scroobious Pip by Edward Lear. Pictures by Nancy Burkert. (1968)

Recommended by Lizz Sinclair: This piece of Lear's nonsense verse was published posthumously, having been “completed” by Ogden Nash. I was entranced by this when I found it in my school library in 2nd or 3rd grade. It is out of print, but worth seeking out...the pictures are amazing, and the story—an affirmation of individuality—quite fun!

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig. (1969)

Recommended by Victoria Bonebakker: I held onto my children's copy of this book, though it was missing its cover, and recently shared it with my grandson, Charlie. The plot involves a donkey who turns into a pebble, but it's really a story about children losing their parents and, of course, about being happy with what you have. Both of these themes seem to have great meaning for young children. The edition issued in 2005 to celebrate the discovery of the original artwork also features Steig's Caldecott Medal acceptance speech from 1970.

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak. (1963)

Recommended by Diane Magras: As a very small child, I was sometimes a bit mischievous, and thus spent “quiet time” in my bedroom on more than one occasion. Creating stories from the top of my head was a good way to pass the time, and thus when my mother first shared *Where the Wild Things Are* with me, I associated closely with Max, the story’s hero. Sendak depicts the fanged and toothy monsters as nightmarish creatures at first, but their relationships to Max soon make their appearances seem simply normal—even sweet. This is a marvelous fantasy about dealing with frustration and anger and using the imagination to soothe hurt.