

Book Banter

May 2009

When Harriet Met Sojourner by Catherine Clinton (Amistad, 2007) is a wonderful story of two women dreaming of freedom. The narrative compares the lives of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, tracing from early childhood their bravery and dedication as each waged a relentless fight to achieve freedom and equality. The illustrations are beautifully textured and dramatic, reflecting the nobility but also the emotional side of Harriet and Sojourner. This story would make a splendid read aloud. It honors appropriately two strong and incredible women.

The Down-to-Earth Guide to Global Warming (Orchard, '07) is an absorbing book, divided into four parts. The first deals with the science of global warming. It explains how climate change happened and lists ways in which individuals can reduce their own carbon imprint. The second part deals with how global warming



affects our weather systems. Hurricanes have become more violent and floods are now plaguing areas that have never flooded before. Warmer temperatures result from the fact that more rain than snow falls on the mountaintops. That rain runs off too rapidly, thus

also being lost as a source of drinking water.

The third part focuses on global warming's impact on plant and animal life—its effect on algae for example (which is a food source for many animals). The current plight of walrus, polar bears, penguins, whales, and butterflies is among the other topics discussed. The book's final section outlines steps children, parents, and teachers can take to reverse global warming.

The *Guide's* outstanding photographs, creative cartoons, and information-filled sidebars make this important book easy to read for students beyond third grade. Older readers—including adults—will also find much to engross them, in this thought-provoking book.

Jane Yolen's new book, *Johnny Appleseed: The Legend and the Truth* (Harper Collins, '08) distinguishes the myths from the truth about John Chapman, with Jim Burke's colorful, layered illustrations serving as a vivid backdrop. Each page begins with a five-line poem reflecting a legendary aspect of Johnny Appleseed. The true history of Chapman follows, along with some often surprising facts about his life. The legend of Johnny Appleseed has expanded widely through the years, but the true story of the real man who labored to change the landscape of America is in its own right inspiring, and in bringing the fables down to bed-rock reality this book reveals a figure very definitely worthy of emulation. It may also lead readers to view our trees—and nature—a different way; perhaps even stimulate them to plant...in the John Chapman (if not Johnny Appleseed) tradition.



Pinkalicious thinks pink is the most perfectly pleasing color. But one day at school the other girls decide black is the better color, and that only babies like pink. Their teasing upsets Pinkalicious, but she remains steadfast in her true pink self. The book ends when she meets another girl who also thinks pink is pretty and powerful—because it can change blue into a pretty purplicious color! *Purplicious* by Victoria and Elizabeth Kann (Harper Collins, 2007) is a great sequel to their earlier *Pinkalicious*, deftly portraying the range of emotions children go through when classmates tease; and also providing an important springboard for discussions about staying true to yourself.

It's been eighty-six years since the Red Sox managed to win a World Series. Eighty-six years of being—"cursed." In *The Prince of Fenway Park* (Harper Collins, '09) twelve-year-old Oscar Egg believes he also is cursed. His real parents didn't want him and now his adoptive mom has dropped him off to live with his strange, sickly step-dad. It turns out that dad lives under Fenway Park with a group of Cursed Creatures that have

been doomed to live out their lives below the Park, until the famous Curse could be broken by a Red Sox victory.

Oscar is a mixed-race child who comes to feel the pain of being unwanted at home and left out when he enters Middle School.....and this is the “curse” he feels. Since the Red Sox did win the Series (in 2004, again in 2007), we know that their curse was indeed finally broken; but *how* it was broken, and the impact this has on the Cursed Creatures living under the Park, and how all of this relates back to Oscar and the “out-sider curse” he feels—that’s the really interesting part in this novel. Author Julianna Baggott has interspersed the history of Fenway and of baseball itself throughout the novel—against the backdrop of Oscar’s story—in a clever and compelling way. This is a great read, appropriate for sports fans and students above fourth grade. Oscar is a likable child, seemingly trapped in an all too familiar web in his private life. Children will be drawn to him, and will especially enjoy the resolution at the end of the novel.

Children’s Literature Committee
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