

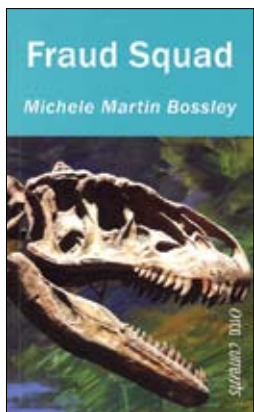
• FICTION •



Chasing a Star

by Norma Charles
Ronsdale Press, 2009
ISBN 978-1-55380-077-4
\$10.95, 174 pp, ages 10+
www.ronsdalepress.com

There is no lack of excitement in this well paced story. Sophie LaGrange's hero is Barbara Ann Scott, former Olympic figure skater turned professional. When she hears that Scott is scheduled to perform in her home town, Sophie starts to plan to meet her, even though her parents are unable to afford tickets to the show. When she finds a diamond bracelet with the skater's initials—and a broken clasp—it seems that Sophie will have the opportunity of returning it to its owner and her dream of meeting Scott will come true. Complications arise, however, and Sophie finds herself threatened by a motorcycle gang (who are trying to recruit her brother), and ultimately saves her hero from a kidnap attempt. Characters and place are well developed and believable, with plenty of detail to provide a sense of suburban life in the early 1950s. Sophie's parents, brothers, and vivacious aunts add depth to the plot. Sophie's anxieties as a newcomer to British Columbia from Quebec will strike a chord with many young readers who have experienced such a transition. An appendix with a biography and photographs of Barbara Ann Scott will be of interest to young figure skaters.



Fraud Squad

by Michele Martin Bossley
Orca Book Publishers, 2009
ISBN 978-1-55469-114-2
\$9.95, 103 pp, ages 10 – 14
www.orcabook.com

Author Michele Martin Bossley, who was born in Massachusetts but grew up in Calgary, Alberta, is the author of eighteen novels for young readers, ten of which have been chosen by the Canadian Children's Book Centre for the "Our Choice" list. *Fraud Squad* is appropriate for middle-school children of either gender

who are reading below grade level.

I found that this novel reminded me very much of the books by the British author, Enid Blyton. Her serial novels, *The Famous Five* and *The Secret Seven*, like *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* series, deal with young people solving mysteries. *Fraud Squad* is of this genre with a "gosh, golly," innocent feel which is reminiscent of these books.

The main characters are Trevor, Nick and Robyn, who attend a junior high school in Drumheller, Alberta. Mysterious things begin to happen when the three friends visit the Royal Tyrrell Museum. They are on a class field trip to see the dinosaur displays. We learn much about dinosaurs, fossils and paleontology digs as the story unfolds, but always in a simple language that is easy to understand. When fossils are discovered at a new dig, what does a teacher have to do with it, and why are there fossils in his filing cabinet? With a great deal of snooping, a spooky night-time surveillance of the dig site, and a disturbing find in the school basement, the three friends try to discover what is really happening. During this time, Robyn must deal with problems caused by rumours. Through another character, the hardship of constantly changing schools is also explored. Despite these underlying issues that young people must often deal with, *Fraud Squad* is a "who-done-it" that will appeal to students who like mysteries.

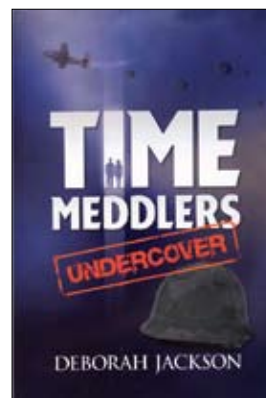


Gwen

by Carolyn Pogue
Sumach Press, 2009
ISBN 978-1-894549-80-6
\$12.95, 157 pp, ages 10+
www.sumachpress.com

In *Gwen*, author Carolyn Pogue has created a strong juvenile character based on her own grandmother who was a "home child"—one of thousands of homeless children who were sent to Canada from England as servants or labourers at the end of the 19th century. Gwen's resilience is remarkable. She survives the rigours of the home (based on the Dr. Barnardo's Homes for Children) where she is placed for a year so that she may be trained to become a domestic servant. After a gruelling sea voyage, she reaches Canadian shores, and her journey continues to her first placement. This is an abusive situation, and Gwen runs away. Subsequently she is placed with a sympathetic family, and begins to thrive.

This novel represents a seldom-recognized part of Canadian history. It is well paced, and illustrates the people and places of its era. Unfortunately, it tends to romanticize what was, by today's standards, appalling mistreatment of children. Those, however, were the standards of the time. A deeper flaw is the stereotyping of some characters, for example, the French Canadian lumberjack with whom Gwen travels on the train to Toronto, and the Mohawk family whose children become her first Canadian friends.



Time Meddlers Undercover

by Deborah Jackson
LBF Books, 2009
ISBN 978-1-897562-43-7
\$16.95, 134 pp, ages 10 – 15
www.deborahjackson.net
www.lbfbooks.com

In this sequel to *Time Meddlers*, Deborah Jackson's first time-travel fantasy novel, Sarah and Matt again try to rescue Matt's father from entrapment in shifting times and places, to bring him back to the present. Ultimately they fail in their mission (promising more installments in this adventure series), but the story of their attempt is an exciting one that takes the two young adventurers to Holland during World War II using the time machine invented by Matt's father. At this time of the German occupation of Holland, danger is everywhere, and Matt and Sarah have the additional menace of their enemy, Nadine, to contend with. Probably best read after reading *Time Meddlers*, which introduces the characters and provides context for its sequel, this is an enthralling story that will have middle grade readers turning the page to find out what risky situations Matt and Sarah will place themselves in next. Information about the English spy network and the Dutch resistance add historical context to the story, and readers are even introduced to famed diarist, Anne Frank. Also included are an Historical Note which outlines some of the facts revealed in Jackson's research for the story, and discussion questions and activities for reading groups.

Reviewers

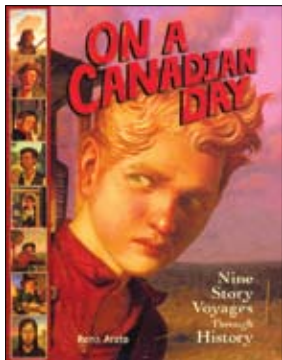
Rebecca Davey's careers have included, but are not limited to, teaching, furniture sales and fundraising. She is now a freelance writer and editor.

Diana Mumford worked as a teacher and teacher-librarian for twenty years before switching to her present career as an editor.

Julie Rank teaches grade nine in Corner Brook, NL. She is always on the lookout for books that will appeal to her 14-year-old students.

Interested in reviewing? Contact: dmumford@CanadianTeacherMagazine.com

• FICTION •



On a Canadian Day Nine Story Voyages Through History

by Rona Arato
Maple Tree Press, 2009
ISBN 978-1-897349-51-9
\$19.95, 96 pp, colour illustrations and b/w photos
ages 9 – 13
www.mapletreepress.com

This anthology of historical short stories would make excellent read-aloud material for Social Studies lessons or an interesting book to put into the hands of young history buffs. Each of the nine stories introduces a child from a different place and significant period in Canadian history: the Great Plains in 1620, New France in 1685, Upper Canada in 1795, Buxton, Ontario in 1863, Toronto in 1900, Halifax in 1929, Saskatchewan in 1935, Vancouver in 1942, and Muskoka, Ontario in 1979. The author skillfully weaves a wealth of historical information into each story, painting a detailed picture of daily life and the social context of the time. Following each story is an essay illustrated with archival photos that provides more information.

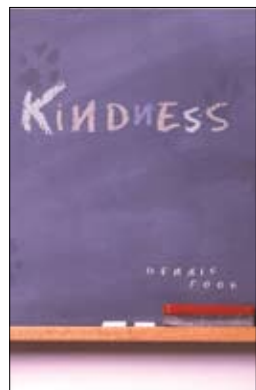


Jacked

by Carrie Mac
Orca Book Publishers, 2009
ISBN 978-1-55469-184-5
\$9.95, 125 pp, ages 12+
www.orcabook.com

The main character in this novel is Zane, a high school aged boy who works part-time at a gas station/convenience store. He refers to himself as a “garden-variety loner.” During one of his morning shifts Zane decides to close the gas station for “five minutes” so he can drive to a nearby deli for a burrito, and a look at the girl who works there. Before he can pull out onto the road his passenger door opens. Zane turns his head and finds himself face to face with a masked man who waves a gun in Zane’s face and says just one word—Drive! At first Zane thinks this is a prank played by a co-worker but soon realizes it is no prank. Zane offers the fellow money, even his beloved car, Victorious, but the gunman just keeps telling Zane to drive. Like the route the gunman forces Zane to take, this story takes many twists and turns. Once they reach their final destination, this unlikely duo find themselves standing together when faced with adversity and prejudice. This novel is aimed at reluctant readers who are in high school. There are a few sexual references and some swearing. Author Carrie Mac has won the Arthur Ellis YA Award and a Canadian Library Association award.

• DRAMA •



Kindness

by Dennis Foon
Playwrights Canada Press, 2009
ISBN 978-0-88754-857-4
\$14.95, 64 pp, ages 8+
www.playwrightscanada.com

In this play by award winning playwright and author, Dennis Foon, eleven-year-old Damon, Keegan and Tessa are struggling with problems familiar to many of today’s pre-teens: bullying, poverty, loss of family members, global disasters. A love of animals eventually emerges as a common thread that links the three former adversaries. It is a compassion for the plight of pets left homeless by Hurricane Katrina that ultimately encourages them to work together and brings out the best in each, and even transforms the local bully. The play has a contemporary setting and the fast-paced dialogue sounds very much “today” so that both actors and audience will feel at home. The roles of the seventeen characters can be shared among fewer actors (the first production was staged with just four actors). Although *Kindness* touches on some serious and troublesome topics, it ends with a hopeful tenderness.

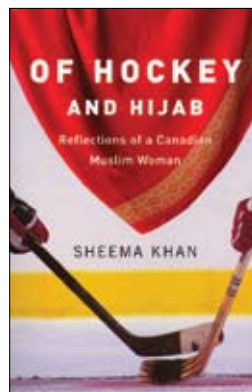
• NON-FICTION •



What's the BIG Idea? Inventions that Changed Life on Earth Forever

by Helaine Becker, illustrated by Steve Attoe
Maple Tree Press, 2009
ISBN 978-1-897349-61-8
\$19.95, 96 pp, colour illustrations, index, ages 8 – 12
www.mapletreepress.com

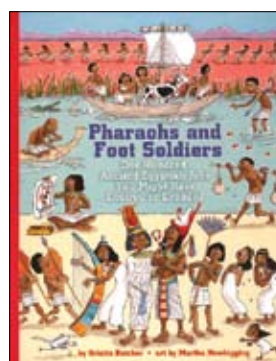
Author Helaine Becker introduces this lively, colourful book with the explanation that all inventions spring from an attempt to meet one of six basic needs. She continues with short explanations of why and how a myriad of devices were invented over the ages, starting from Long, Long Ago (e.g., needle, wheel, plow) and Long Ago (e.g., printing press, clock, steam engine) and moving on to Not So Long Ago (e.g., car, telephone, plastic, computer) and What's Next? which highlights some possible high-tech solutions to modern needs. There are also pages that introduce Big Thinkers who have influenced human inventions, and two-page spreads that illustrate a variety of inventions in particular settings (e.g., doctor's office, classroom). Each page is designed to accommodate text, humorous illustrations and sidebars, all bound to capture the interest of the target audience—I can imagine pairs of students really enjoying reading and discussing this book together. There is a lot of information about human history contained in these 96 pages, delivered in a style that will entertain as well as educate.



Of Hockey and Hijab Reflections of a Canadian Muslim Woman

by Sheema Khan
Tsar Publications, 2009
ISBN 978-1-894770-56-9
\$25.95, 168 pp, adult
www.tsarbooks.com

The essays in this collection were written as a monthly column for *The Globe and Mail* from 2002 to 2009. They provide insight into the Muslim faith, and comment on recent events that have brought fear to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, with an emphasis on their effect in Canada. Sheema Khan works to promote understanding among people of different faiths and nationalities. She calls for peace and understanding, and abhors violence in the name of faith and retribution. Teachers interested in increasing their own understanding of Islam will find these essays enlightening, and a ray of sanity and hope shining through wide-spread mistrust and harmful misunderstanding.



Pharaohs and Foot Soldiers One Hundred Ancient Egyptian Jobs You Might Have Desired or Dreaded

by Kristin Butcher
illustrated by Martha Newbigging
Annick Press, 2009
ISBN 978-1-55451-170-9
\$16.95, 96 pp, colour illustrations, index, ages 9 – 12
www.annickpress.com

This is the fourth in a series of books that explore occupations in ancient times. This volume focuses on Egypt 5000 years ago, describing 100 jobs that would have been common in the days of pharaohs and pyramids. The book begins with a short introductory section which provides information about this period in history; the remaining pages are devoted to half- or one-page discussions about particular jobs, grouped into fifteen chapters with titles such as Army Jobs, Government Jobs, Artisan Jobs, etc. The text speaks directly to the reader, as if describing his/her own occupation, in a light-hearted style that helps to bring the historical information to life. The cartoon-like illustrations contribute to the enjoyment of reading the text, often adding a touch of humour. Sidebars provide additional, supporting information on many pages. The simple page lay-up and short job profiles make this book easily accessible as a source of information for Social Studies projects or simply browsing out of interest.