

StoneSoup



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StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting
creative kids around the world*

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Editor's Note

You'll quickly notice this issue is more than a bit different than our other issues. There are no stories, artworks, or poems—only reviews! (I talk about the value of critical reading and reviewing in a longer note on page 4.)

The other thing that makes this issue different is the way we put it together: most of the reviews were commissioned. This means that instead of passively waiting for writers to submit on their own, we actively reached out to both former contributors and current reviewers for our website. We asked them specifically to review a classic book, poem, or film from a list we at Stone Soup compiled. I hope the results inspire your summer reading!

Letters: We love to hear from our readers. Please post a comment on our website or write to us via Submittable or editor@stonesoup.com. Your letter might be published on our occasional Letters to the Editor page.

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On the cover:
“Tree Library”
watercolor
by Li Lingfei, 10
Shanghai, China

StoneSoup

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The Value of Critical Reading

by Emma Wood, Editor

In addition to being Editor of Stone Soup, I am also a university instructor. When I teach creative writing, I like to tell my students that the most important part of the class is not writing but reading because reading will teach you how to be a writer.

As you sit there, eagerly turning the page to find out what will happen next, you are also taking in sentence structures, vocabulary, pacing, and the many other features that make up a poem, a story, or a book. On top of this, you are learning about what kinds of books have already been written. If you want to be a writer, it is crucial to learn about the history of the genre in which you want to write. All writers build on the work of other writers. Writing that is not built on this foundation of knowledge is often, like a house without a foundation, unable to stand for long. Finally, when you read, you are also learning about your own tastes: What do you like to read, and why? This can often help you uncover interesting insights about yourself.

But all reading is not equal. Have you ever been told “You are what you eat”? Well, the same is true for what you read. If you want to be a mystery writer, read mysteries; if you want to be a poet, read poetry. But you don’t want to read just any mysteries or poems: you want to read the best mysteries and the best poems (with some breaks in between for some literary “junk food”!). The best writing and art is that which rewards close study and rereading. It is the novel or poem that you can’t stop thinking about, the one in which you find something new each time you read it. It is classic literature.

The review is a place to celebrate reading—but not just any reading: close and critical reading. Writing a review pushes you to engage more deeply with a text than you might have otherwise. It opens up a dialogue between you and the book and the author, allowing you to discover more about yourself and the text in the process. In my experience, writing critically about a work I already love makes me love it even more: it makes visible all the previously invisible threads that make it so incredible. I realize now what I should say to my creative writing students is that reading critically will teach them how to be writers.

You will notice that one of the reviews in this issue is a review of a film. Although I am talking specifically about books in this introduction, movies, paintings, sculptures, and other visual modes can be “read” as well, and it is just as important to engage critically with work in these mediums as well.

With this in mind, I ask you to try to write at least one review this summer. Read, listen, watch; then re-read, re-listen, re-watch. And, finally, think critically about what you’ve just encountered. See what it feels like to spend time, outside of class, thinking through a work you really love (or hate).

We look forward to reading the results!

Novel Reviews

Frankenstein

by Mary Shelley

Before I begin this review, I want you to think of everything you think you know about *Frankenstein*. What comes to mind even when I think of *Frankenstein* is the classic depiction from the old horror movies. The insane doctor with a German accent screaming, “It’s alive!” as lightning lights up the sky and magically brings his new friend to life. A hideous monster who speaks in broken English. In the book, none of that happened. The lightning thing never happened; Victor never said, “It’s alive!”; and the monster was, according to Victor, quite attractive (with the exception of his somewhat unsettling eyes, but I’ll get to that later). Rather than the science fiction horror story of the silver screen, the original book was actually a profound and grim commentary on the dangers of unethical science.

The novel, written by Mary Shelley in 1818, opens with Captain Robert Walton aboard a ship drifting through the North Pole. He spots none other than Victor Frankenstein, stranded on the ice and looking very displeased indeed. He takes Victor on board and, naturally, wants some context as to why this scientist is stranded in the middle of the North Pole. Victor launches into an exhaustive life story told in excruciating detail from the very beginning.

Victor, born in Italy to a German

family and raised in Geneva, Switzerland, is a brilliant scientist who grew up reading the works of outdated alchemists and scientists. This motivates him to get a real education and pursue science as a career. This whole bit bored me to tears, and I’m sure it will do the same for you, so I’m going to skip on to the juicy part: Fast forward to years later. Victor has dropped out of college (no, he was not a doctor, not even close) and decided that he’s going to go dig up some graves, stitch some body parts together, and bring his new creation to life. Grave robbing and playing god. Classic midlife crisis.

To someone like Victor, this is a completely normal thought process. Victor does indeed bring this creation to life, though it’s never said how (screenwriters had to make up the lightning thing all on their own). He also never says, “It’s alive!” His reaction is more of an “Oh, cool.”

Contrary to the classic Hollywood nightmare, said monster is actually very beautiful. The monster’s only fault is that he has terrifying eyes. Victor is, in fact, so afraid of the monster’s eyes that he declares the experiment a failure, ditches the monster, and leaves the monster to his own devices. Deadbeat dad of the century right there.

The monster wanders out into the world, curious and kind and eager

Reviewed by
Valentine Wulf, 13
Seattle, WA

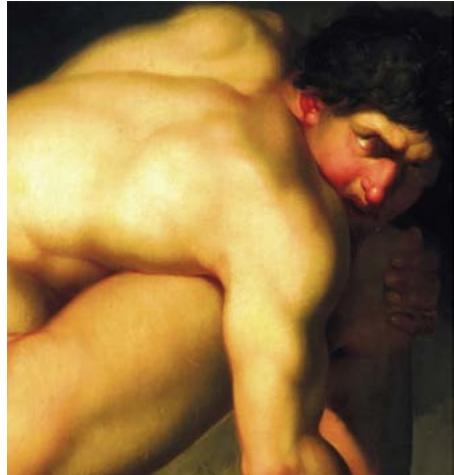


to learn. The monster soon finds out, however, that people are afraid of him. He is naturally confused and scared and runs into the forests of the Swiss Alps. There he is lost, wandering around and discovering the world for the first time, given that he's basically a giant baby.

The monster learns to speak by listening in on a rural family in the Alps. He begins to understand that all his misfortunes are caused by Victor, the one person who was supposed to take care of him. From there, the monster decides to seek revenge on his creator. I won't spoil the rest!

Victor, out of arrogance and disregard for anyone but himself, brought the monster to life without regard for the consequences of his actions. When this backfired, instead of accepting responsibility for his mistake and either killing the monster or raising him properly, he hightails it out of Switzerland and leaves the monster to fend for itself rather than face what he has done.

Victor isn't a mad scientist, nor is he a hero. He is someone whose life fell into ruin because he only thought about himself; he let his ego dictate his work. To all the people who say "Frankenstein was the doctor, not the monster"—in this story, there are two monsters. And one of them is indeed named Frankenstein.



PENGUIN CLASSICS

MARY SHELLEY

Frankenstein

Penguin Classics: New York, 2003;
originally published in 1818.

A Little Princess

by Frances Hodgson Burnett

I consider myself privileged. I have a wonderful family, live in a big house in the suburbs, and I go to a highly ranked school. My family really cares about me. I have a great life with wonderful opportunities and perform well in school and in the extracurricular activities I participate in. I am most likely a child who is awfully spoiled. Although I can see it so clearly now, there was once a time that I thought I did not have a very good life. There was always someone who had something better than me. So what if I had a cookie in my lunch? Someone else had two cookies, and obviously, two cookies were undoubtedly superior to one cookie. I was a disagreeable young girl and coveted more than I had. I didn't see how lucky I truly was.

Now I know that it was an amazing miracle that my little first-grade self plucked *A Little Princess* from the shelf one bitterly cold winter morning.

As I studied the book cover for the very first time, I was captivated by the girl my age in a rosy pink frock on the cover. A book about someone my age? I excitedly pondered in my head. I saw the title, *A Little Princess*, printed on the cover in a cursive font I admired. A girl my age who was a princess? This is going to be a good book! I had no idea how true that statement would turn out to be.

When I started reading the book that very weekend, I was treated to descriptions of smoggy, turn-of-the-century London. This was where rich, clever Sara Crewe went to a dignified yet stingy old boarding school. Sara was no ordinary girl, though. She was undoubtedly kind. Instead of being friends with the popular mean girls, she sparked friendships with the misfit students and younger girls. She was also a star student, yet she didn't brag about her cleverness to her peers. She was truly a lovely little girl.

I immediately found distinct similarities between Sara and me. We both had an intriguing look, that was different yet pretty. We were both very clever and deemed "smart" by our teachers and peers.

But as I read on, I found so much more in this book. As I traveled through heartbreak, hardships, and cruelty with Sara as my companion, I uncovered a true secret of life. As she was abused, starved, and cruelly mistreated, Sara was still gracious. She was tenderly chivalrous to all those she crossed paths with, even when they greeted her by barking orders at her, even as she labored over difficult work. Seeing this, I had a sudden epiphany. I stopped reading all at once and thought long and hard. If Sara could be magnanimous in a time of great trial, shouldn't I be even more so when I had so much more to be gra-

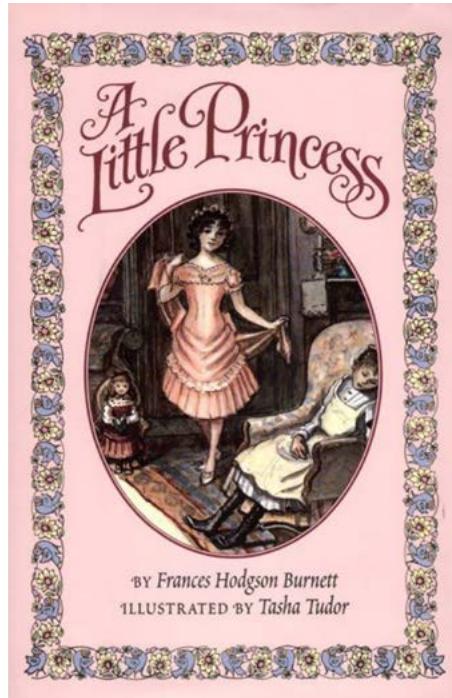
Reviewed by
Ava Horton, 13
Gresham, OR



cious about? Couldn't I give so much more to those in greater need than I was? I had the power to be gracious and kind. That was when I decided to use it.

A Little Princess taught me to be a friend. It also taught me to be kind and grateful. I never neglect to say "please" or "thank you" because I know, though small, those simple words can be extremely powerful.

You know you've found a great book when it transforms your thought process. Now I know how lucky I was to find a little princess on the shelf that fateful Monday morning.



Harper Classics: New York, 1998;
originally published in 1905.

A Little Princess

by Frances Hodgson Burnett

What does a person really need in order to be happy? If you were to lose every tangible thing which gives you joy now, what intangible things would make life still worth living? The novel *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett answers these two questions from the point of view of an eleven-year-old with a response which is ultimately simple, sweet, and surprisingly wise.

The wealthy, pampered Sara Crewe finds herself alone in a new country when her doting father leaves her at a London boarding school. As she adjusts to her new life, her character turns out to be surprisingly different from that of the stereotypical rich, spoiled girl; she uses her advantage and intelligence to help those of her classmates cast off by the other girls. But when Sara's father suddenly passes away, leaving behind nothing but debt, her life is turned upside down. Transformed from a veritable princess into an unpaid scullery maid, she loses all the expensive comforts she is used to. However, Sara's kindness, tenacity and imagination afford her new joys, eventually bringing her all the way to a happy ending.

There are two intertwining themes in *A Little Princess*: the power of imagination and the power of kindness. When I first read the novel as a quiet "dreamer" third-grader,

I was surprised and impressed by the way Sara conquers her troubles: by imagining that she is a princess. Telling herself that she is above those who ridicule her, she ends up making her dream a reality by striving to act better than her tormentors—even if it means hiding sadness or biting back anger. She notices and appreciates the small joys in her new life, pretending to be elsewhere when her sadness overcomes her. Sara's ability to find joy in apparent bleakness is so great that friends who visit from their comfortable rooms go away envying her bare, drafty attic; her tenacious cheerfulness beautifies her poverty more than money and expensive furniture do for her peers.

The second recurring idea in *A Little Princess* is the impact of kind actions. Sara's painstaking kindness to many characters, including the scullery maid Becky, spoiled toddler Lottie, learning-challenged Ermengarde, and even a lost monkey, repeatedly comes back to help her when she needs it most. Her resolution to be a princess in actions, if not in wealth, is one which continually acts in her favor—giving her hope, self-respect, and sustenance just as she strives to give it to others.

Years after first reading the book, I still try to apply its themes to my own life. A touch of imagination and kindness has helped me through countless hard days and added joy to easy ones;

Reviewed by
Vandana Ravi, 12
Palo Alto, CA



rereading Sara's story now lifts my spirits. *A Little Princess* is the essence of what we can live for, of how we can deal with hard times, whisked into a story just close enough to a fairy tale that its moral feels more like a familiar friend than a stranger.

I've loved reading the classics ever since I was old enough to understand them. I carried them with me on school trips, piled them next to my pillow, and quoted and cherished their words wherever I went. But they aren't just special to me because of their universally relatable plots or old-fashioned language—although I enjoy those elements too. Classics—older books which have survived generations—tend to carry with them a host of life lessons, buried in the pages like treasure waiting to be found. These lessons can remind us of what we care about, offer advice when things get difficult, and shine a few rays of hope into our lives when we most need them. That is my favorite thing about reading: its power to guide the reader through real life.

If you were to lose everything, what intangible things would make life still worth living? There are a few answers to that question. Imagination. Hope. Kindness. Friendship. And maybe, as a comforting map to help you find the purpose you're looking for, the imprint of a good book on your heart.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

by Betty Smith

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith is the story of a Brooklyn girl with Irish ancestors who grows up at the beginning of the 20th century with all the hardships that come from not having enough money in the house, a drunkard for a father, and a mother who prefers her son to her daughter. Although Frances Nolan's life is riddled with complications, she never ceases to find beautiful places and things in life—like the flower in the bowl at the library that changes with every season or the little school 12 blocks away that she dearly wants to attend.

We follow Francie from her birth to womanhood. We meet her singing father and her hardworking mother, her three aunts and her saint-like grandmother, as well as Cornelius (or "Neeley" for short), her little brother who is so favored by their mother. As Francie grows older, she realizes how poverty limits her family, and she knows she doesn't want to grow old poor. So at the age of 14, Francie gets a job, pretending she is 16, to help bring in more money for her family.

A lot of the story's main ideas are about life lessons, about poverty, and what it was like to be a girl, then a woman, at the beginning of the 20th century.

One of the sharper life lessons of the story is when Francie learns that not everyone appreciates the

truth. She has started to write stories based on her surroundings, but her teacher does not approve. Francie used to write beautiful, made-up stories which Miss Gardner loved, but when Francie starts to write stories about drunkenness, poverty, and hunger Miss Gardner gets angry:

"You were one of my best pupils. You wrote so prettily. I enjoyed your compositions. But these last ones . . ." she flicked at them contemptuously. ". . . poverty, starvation and drunkenness are ugly subjects to choose. We all admit these things exist. But one doesn't write about them."

"What does one write about?"

...

"One delves into the imagination and finds beauty there . . ."

Francie and the reader understand that Miss Gardner is wrong because truth is also poverty and hunger and drunkenness. This is by no means all of what truth is, but it is still truth. To say that beauty is the only truth is to only see half of reality. After this conversation with her teacher, Francie realizes for the first time that educated people might see her life as revolting.

I read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* just after finishing *The Chosen* by Chaim

Reviewed by
Claire Rinterknecht, 14
Strasbourg, France



Potok. *The Chosen* is a novel set in Brooklyn about Reuven and Danny, two Jewish boys who become best friends and have to live through the silence that Danny's father inflicts upon Danny. It was interesting to read two books set in the same location but at different time periods. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is set around World War I, and *The Chosen* is set around World War II. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie walks home down Graham Avenue, and she notices everything:

She was excited by the filled pushcarts—each a little store in itself—the bargaining, emotional Jews and the peculiar smells of the neighborhood; baked stuffed fish, sour rye bread fresh from the oven, and something that smelled of honey boiling. She stared at the bearded men in their alpaca skullcaps and silkolene coats . . .

Similarly, in *The Chosen*, Reuven walks with Danny down the street where Danny lives. He notices how:

[T]he street throbbed with the noise of playing children who seemed in constant motion, dodging around cars, racing up and down steps, chasing after cats, climbing trees, balanc-

ing themselves as they tried walking on top of the banisters, pursuing one another in furious games of tag—all with their fringes and earlocks dancing wildly in the air and trailing out behind them.

These two passages are very similar in their description of the streets in Brooklyn, even though more than 20 years and two world wars separate the two stories. Readers get a real sense in both books of how varied and alive Brooklyn was.

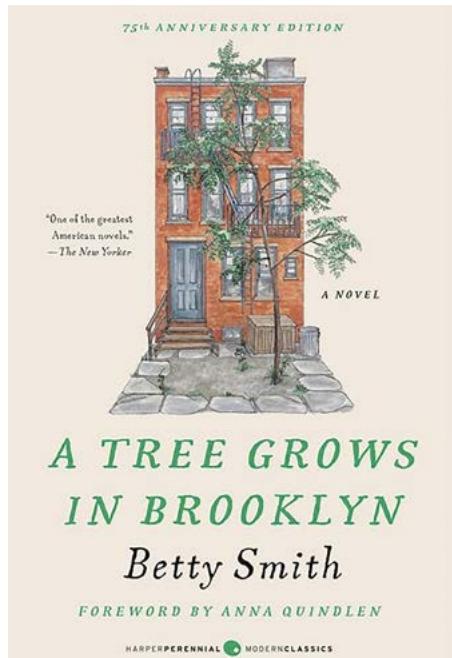
A Tree Grows in Brooklyn is beautifully written and entrances the reader from the first page. I recommend it for mid to older teens. It is not a simple read because of the style of writing, which often includes the Brooklyn slang from the time. One example of the slang in the book is when a mean little girl spits in Francie's face but Francie doesn't cry. The little girl says, "Why don't you bust out crying, you dockle? Want I should spit in your face again?" To "bust out crying" is just like to burst out crying, but "dickle" does not have a modern definition in the dictionary because it was part of the local slang in that period. I had to search a little to find any kind of meaning and finally found that a dockle is a sort of doll or bundle of thread, but, in this quote, "dickle" is clearly an insult.

It is difficult to capture the feeling of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* because the way Betty Smith writes is almost otherworldly. But at the same time, the things she writes about are so realistically concrete. The following quote conveys some of the otherworldly but realistic aura of the book.

The tree whose leaf umbrellas had curled around, under and over the fire escape, had been cut down because the housewives complained that wash on the lines got entangled in its branches . . . But the tree hadn't died . . . it hadn't died. A new tree had grown from the stump, and its trunk had grown along the ground until it reached a place where there were no wash lines above it. Then it started to grow towards the sky again.

This quote is both beautifully written and is an elegant metaphor for Francie's life, as she was cut down often but also found a way around her troubles in order to grow and thrive.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn is very much about a woman's life in a man's world, and Francie's life represents all of the struggles and obstacles women faced. But her life also represents the beauty and achievements that brave women have lived through. I hope future readers will find it as special as I did.



Harper Perennial: New York, 2018;
originally published in 1943.

See also: Potok, Chaim. *The Chosen*. Penguin Random House: New York, 1996.

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

by E.L. Konigsburg

Raise your hand if you like art. Yes? Good. Raise your hand if you like adventure. Excellent. Now raise your hand if you like books. Spectacular! As it happens, there is a book that can satisfy all of those things—*From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg. A blend of mystery, adventure, and a little history, *From the Mixed-Up Files* is instantly recognizable as a classic book for the ages.

The main character, Claudia, feels that her life is riddled with unfair treatment, such as having to constantly do chores for very little allowance. So she resolves to run away from home with her younger brother, Jamie, (mostly because of his transistor radio and all the money he's saved up) on the Metro-North train and live in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City for a little while. She plans to learn as much as possible about the museum in the time that they will spend there. While hiding in the museum, Claudia and Jamie notice that people are swarming

to see an angel sculpture. Claudia wonders why everybody is so excited about it, so she finds a *New York Times* and reads an article on the angel, which says that it is suspected to be by Michelangelo. She decides to solve the mystery of the statue's origins, and in doing so will satisfy her real motive for running away: to have made a significant change in her life by the time she goes home.

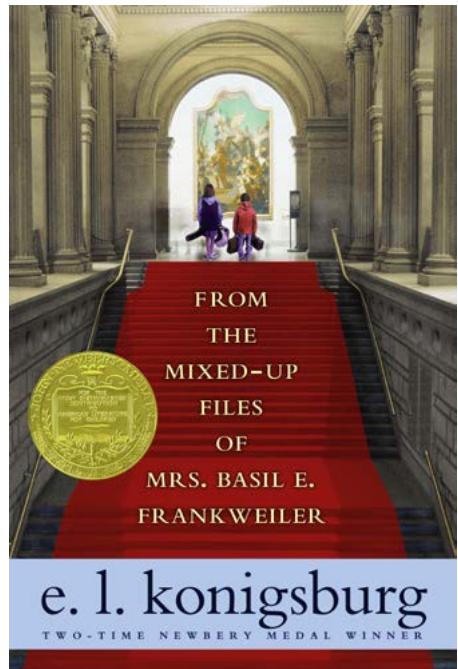
The story is told as a series of letters written by a character who only appears at the end, Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, who is recording Claudia and Jamie's tale in a letter to her lawyer, Saxonberg. Mrs. Frankweiler's asides to Saxonberg are hilarious. Another aspect of the story I enjoyed is how relatable it is. Anyone with at least one sibling knows how incredibly exasperating they are at times (I myself have a little brother); however, on occasion, you are glad to have them around. *From the Mixed-Up Files* captures this relationship perfectly, and subtly encourages siblings to get along more.

Reviewed by
Nina Vigil, 11
Katonah, NY



by focusing on the positives. Another way the author creates a sense of relatability is by describing the many frustrations children have in life (Claudia's "injustices") and also our desire for adventure and excitement. I have always wanted something really exciting like a grand adventure or mystery to happen to me, although this wish has unfortunately not yet been granted!

Stone Soup put this book on their list of classics, and I wholeheartedly agree with the decision. *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* demonstrates all the defining qualities of a classic, and it deserves this honor. For those of you who haven't read it, go read it. For those of you who have read it, good; now go read it again.



Atheneum Books for Young Readers: New York, 2007; originally published in 1967.

Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl

My mother always told me tales from her childhood. Most were happy stories that made me laugh. Others were sad and made me worry about her. Sometimes she told me stories about her own mother, my Yiayia, who had an even harder childhood, raised in a small village in Greece. My mother told me that without experiences, even hard ones, sad ones, and ones that make me cry, a writer will not

have anything to write about. Roald Dahl puts his experiences of life, both happy and sad, in his autobiography, *Boy: Tales of Childhood*.

Roald Dahl, the proud author of many funny children's books, isn't the same on the inside as what he seems like on the outside. After reading *Boy*, I learned that he had a hard, troubling life as a kid, and those experiences are the ones that inspired him to write this

Reviewed by
Marilena Korahais, 8
Whitestone, NY

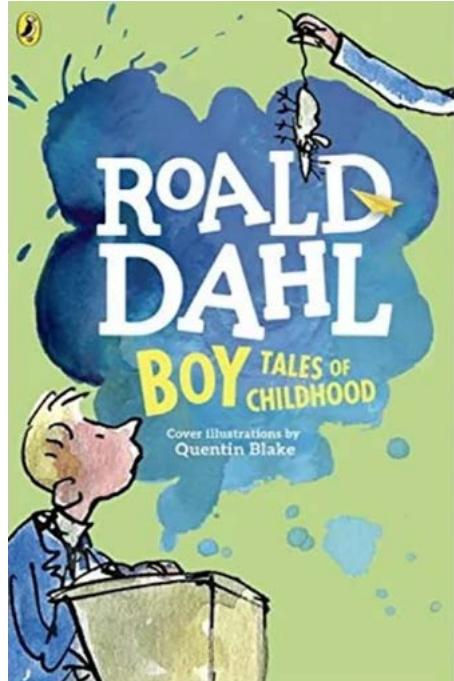


book.

This book is not like others I've read. It begins with a memory of his dad working on the roof of their house; his dad tragically falls off and breaks his arm. The nearest doctor was drunk, and he dislocated the poor man's arm. Because of this, Dahl's father had to get it amputated and later invented a tool that helped him cut and eat his food with one hand.

Dahl also shares his experiences at boarding school where he was often mistreated. But, he also shares happy times, like the time he and his friends put a dead mouse in the mean candy-lady's store. Dahl's life was full of different emotions, and I realized I am very lucky that my life is filled with happiness. Still, everybody has had some sad experiences, even if they haven't had a lot of them.

Though I wish Dahl's life wasn't full of melancholy events, I believe that is part of the reason he is such a good writer. Most kids know about *The BFG*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *Matilda*, but they may not know who Dahl was and what his life was like or how this affected his writing. Without these experiences that made him who he was, he may have had nothing to write about at all. I treasure his stories the way I treasure the stories from my mother and grandmother.



Puffin: New York, 2016; originally published in 1984.

Number the Stars

by Lois Lowry

Number the Stars is about Annemarie Johansen, a Christian girl living in Denmark during World War II. She is best friends with Ellen Rosen, a Jewish girl. When the Nazis decide to “relocate” Denmark’s Jews, Annemarie and her family hide Ellen to keep her safe. Later, Annemarie helps get Ellen’s family and other Jews across the sea to Sweden, a country that was Nazi-free. At the end of the book, Annemarie has to summon all her bravery to make a trip on her own that will decide the fate of the Jews her family was trying to save.

Bravery is an important theme in the book. Annemarie is put in countless situations where she has to be brave or the consequences would be terrible. I admire her very much for this. I also try to be brave. It is a quality I would like to have. However, I don’t feel brave or think that I am. There are silly things that scare me; for example, I get scared if there is an insect nearby. I know this is silly, but still, I am not brave when I see a bug. In the book, Annemarie also says that she does not feel brave. However, when it is necessary to be brave, she is. Fortunately, I have never been in anything close to the terrifying situations Annemarie faced. Still, the book inspired me to think that if someone could be brave in such terrible and scary situations, then maybe I could be brave, too, in the silly situations that I find myself in. All

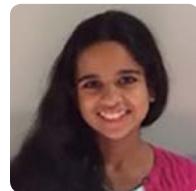
I have to do is try.

Another part of the book that spoke to me was a scene involving the Star of David necklace Ellen always wore. In the scene, Ellen has to quickly remove the necklace before the Nazis march into the room. Since there is not enough time to undo the clasp, Annemarie rips the necklace off.

I identify with Ellen because I also have a Star of David necklace. My necklace was given to me by my great-grandmother who survived the Holocaust. At the time of the Holocaust, being identified as Jewish through wearing such a necklace could endanger your life. Still, even though my great-grandmother went through the Holocaust, she wanted to give the necklace to me. I think that this is because she thought wearing such a necklace was important. The necklace is a symbol of my culture, and of Ellen’s. And that culture is part of our identity no matter what happens. At the end of the book, Annemarie fixes Ellen’s necklace to give back to her one day. She knows that, like my great-grandmother, Ellen would still want to wear her Star of David necklace.

My great-grandmother was from Lithuania. When the Nazis invaded, she was put in a ghetto. Before the ghetto was liquidated, she and my great-grandfather escaped. Her family friends hid her afterward. She later

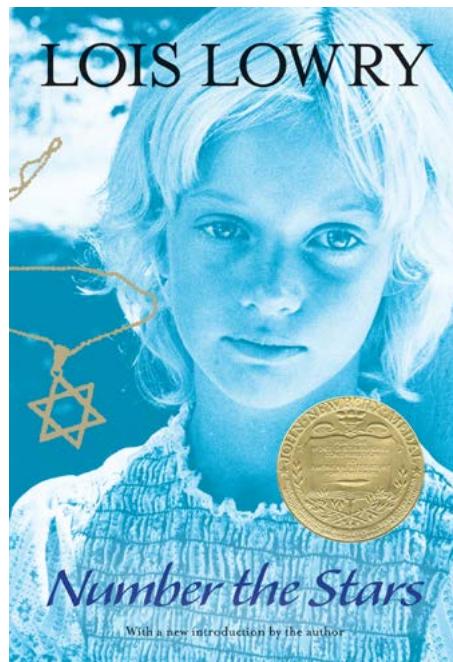
Reviewed by
Maya Viswanathan, 13
Champaign, IL



moved to Israel and then America, where I was born. Because of her experience and the experience of my other great-grandparents in the Holocaust, this book was especially meaningful to me. It is also important to me to remember the Holocaust so that something like it never happens again.

The Holocaust was a horrible tragedy and therefore reading about it is often very difficult. But, as far as Holocaust books go, this one was less dismal. And so it is a good book to read if you haven't learned much about the topic. Even if you do know a lot about it, I recommend reading this book, because it focuses on good people who helped the Jews. In Denmark, people were very much against the Nazis. The book demonstrates how people helped the Jews escape and then took care of their possessions after they left. This book illustrates the kindness of the non-Jews in Denmark. We can learn from them that, even in the face of such danger, it is still worth it to help and be kind to others—a lesson that can't be discussed too much.

I read this book a few years ago, and I recently read it again. Both times I enjoyed it a lot and learned a lot. This book is a meaningful story about an inspiring, brave girl who did what was right, and it was even funny at times. If you have never read *Number the Stars*, I strongly recommend reading it.



HMH Books for Young Readers: New York, 2011; originally published in 1989.

The Book Thief

by Markus Zusak

A snow-clad cemetery in Germany, a few months before World War II. A girl cannot believe her brother has just died, as she and her mother witness the burial. A black book drops to the snow without the owner's knowledge. The girl picks it up and clings to it. Her debut in the career of book thievery. Some hours later, the girl and her mother go their separate ways. The girl goes to her new parents. She does not know where her mother is going.

Liesel Meminger (the aforementioned girl) is adopted by Hans and Rosa Hubermann of 33 Himmel Street. The Hubermanns are not rich. They decide to raise Liesel because they are getting an allowance for it. Despite this, Liesel could not have a better father than Hans Hubermann. Hans comes to Liesel's room after her frequent nightmares and comforts her, or sometimes plays the accordion for her. The same cannot be said of Rosa. Though she loves Liesel, she is constantly addressing her as "pig," often accompanied by a beating. Liesel soon adapts to life in Himmel Street, befriending Rudy Steiner, one of her neighbors. Liesel and Rudy play football with the other kids, go to school together, and also go on thieving adventures. (Their loot mostly consists of food and an occasional book.)

It is Hans who discovers Liesel's

first stolen book. (She was lucky it wasn't Rosa!) Liesel never learned how to read and Hans has little education. Yet, they manage to finish the book, with Liesel learning how to read in the process. Perhaps these reading sessions develop a love for reading in Liesel. And perhaps this is the reason Liesel feels a compulsion to steal books.

The narrator of *The Book Thief* is Death. What does death have to do with a girl stealing books, you say? But the book is not just about that; it is also a story based in World War II Germany where death had the leading role. Death is not just an observer; he is as much a character as Liesel herself. Death is a wonderful narrator. Often, he includes his flashbacks and images of the future. His narration is also not dry and boring. Death can be funny; he can be friendly. In fact, he is more human than most people think.

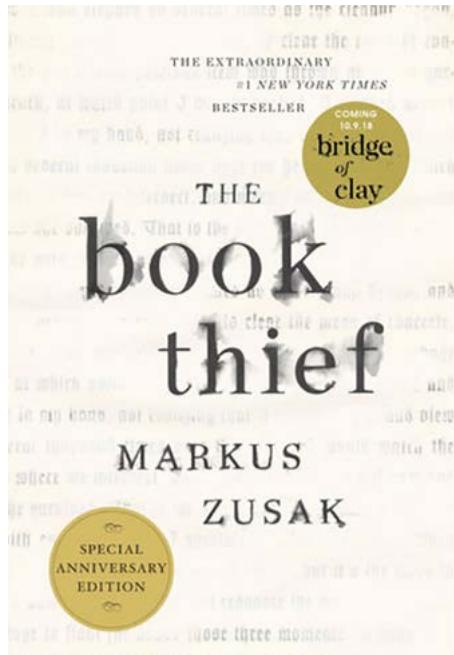
During the Holocaust, propaganda was common. Hitler fooled the majority of Germans with his words: Germans only read books which were approved by the Nazis; the media was used to create the impression that Hitler was Germany's savior; Nazis used media to convince people that Jews did not deserve to live. For this reason, the author puts a lot of emphasis on the power of words. Those who can tame words can gain

Reviewed by
Ananda Bhaduri, 13
Guwahati, India



a lot of power. Liesel, for instance, is one of these “word shakers.” By the end of the book, not only can Liesel read novels on her own, she has also started writing the story of her life. (A girl living under Nazi occupation, writing the story of her own life . . . That seems familiar.)

The Book Thief is a bundle of themes. It is about “pure” Germans risking their lives to help Jews, the power of words, death, and war. However, unlike most Holocaust books, it does not focus primarily on Jewish characters. *The Book Thief* is unique because it presents us a rare perspective on living as a non-Jewish German in Nazi Germany. If you haven’t read *The Book Thief*, you are missing out on one of the best Holocaust books.



Knopf Books for Young Readers: New York, 2016; originally published in 2005.

Film Reviews

When Marnie Was There

A Studio Ghibli Film

When Marnie Was There is the last movie released by the famous Japanese animation studio called Studio Ghibli, and the first I saw that got me hooked on anime, a style of Japanese animation. The story follows Anna, a young teenage girl suffering from asthma, who is sent to the country by her foster parents to live with her relatives for a while. One day, she comes across an empty house known as the Marsh House. She returns to the house time and time again to find no one living inside until, one day, she finds a young girl named Marnie who insists that Anna never tell anyone about her. As the movie progresses, we learn more about Anna and Marnie's personal backgrounds and life stories, and finally, about how their two lives might intersect ...

There are three reasons I absolutely love this movie. First, I felt great empathy toward Anna. Anna is a shy and lonely girl who is trying to fit in, and I am also shy. Marnie is a good friend to Anna: she is kind and lighthearted and always tries to cheer Anna up.

Secondly, I appreciate that the two girls don't have a normal friendship. Other movies about friendship typically show friends having fun until a problem occurs that tests their friendship—and then the friends either reunite or break up and drift

apart. For example, *Bumblebee* (part of the *Transformers* film series) is about a young girl and a robot who become close friends. They have various fun adventures during the movie until the girl finds out Bumblebee is being hunted by other robots. *When Marnie Was There* is different because Anna and Marnie never get to really know each other. There seems to be a mystery or secret that's keeping them at a distance from each other. And so, this creates suspense and leaves the viewer waiting for more. Who is Marnie? Is she a real person? Is she a ghost? Is she a figment of Anna's imagination? What is their relationship? The plot is never pieced together, and it's up to you to figure it out. This is a concept I have never seen before in a movie.

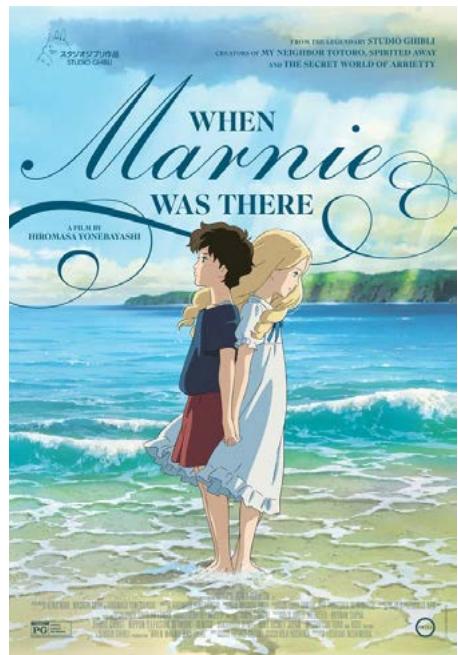
Finally, I love the animation. Most other anime films have gross characters and ugly worlds. For example, *Spirited Away*, another Studio Ghibli film, has a really twisty world with really ugly characters; they all look old and wrinkly. But in *When Marnie Was There*, the animation is realistic, and you can see everything perfectly just like in the real world. Unlike Disney animation, the anime in this movie is more beautiful because you can see all the details on the birds, flowers, and trees, and you feel like you're in Marnie's world. Disney animation has mostly empty worlds, and the setting

doesn't feel alive. This is because the Disney world focuses primarily on the story happening in the movie and not on world-building.

This movie, while insanely good, does have some flaws. You see, the entire movie is literally Anna going to Marnie, and nothing else; there are barely any scenes in the movie that are not related to the friendship between the two girls. Another annoying thing is that the movie is really slow. Anna learns about Marnie very slowly. So you always have to wait for Anna to find Marnie over and over again and also wait patiently through many unnecessary scenes of Anna drawing, doing chores, etc. What's up with this slow waiting? Other than those two flaws, I feel this movie was extremely clever for a friendship story.

If you like a fast-paced thriller or action like the *Harry Potter* movies, then this movie is not for you. This movie requires deep thinking. Overall, *When Marnie Was There* is a wonderful Studio Ghibli movie and will stay in my mind as one of the greatest emotional movies of all time. There is pain, sadness, hope, and loss, and that is why I cried at the end!

Reviewed by
Abhi Sukhdial, 11
Stillwater, OK



Directed by Hiromasa Yonebayashi, 2015.



Poetry Reviews

“Hope” is the thing with feathers

by Emily Dickinson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Reviewed by
Kate Choi, 14
Seoul, Korea



What is hope? Why do we feel hope?
And why is hope so important to us?
In a story from Greek mythology, hope
was famously the only item to remain
in Pandora's box after it released the
evils of the world, demonstrating
just how valuable hope is to us: had
hope escaped from our possession,
humanity would have been unable to
survive the evils of the world.

Emily Dickinson believed in the power and value of hope just as strongly. Famously reclusive, this 19th-century American poet remained largely unpublished during her lifetime, by her own choice. After her death in 1886, however, her poems were discovered and published by her close friends and family. Since then, Dickinson has grown to become one of the most mysterious, emblematic, and loved poets of all time with her short but powerful poems. Much of her poetry is devoted to exploring the nature of life, death, and what she called the "Circumference," the boundary where the reality that we know meets that of the sublime—God, for example, or for the less religiously inclined, Truth with a capital T. Dickinson was the first poet to really capture my attention when I was younger, and she is now one of my all-time favorite writers.

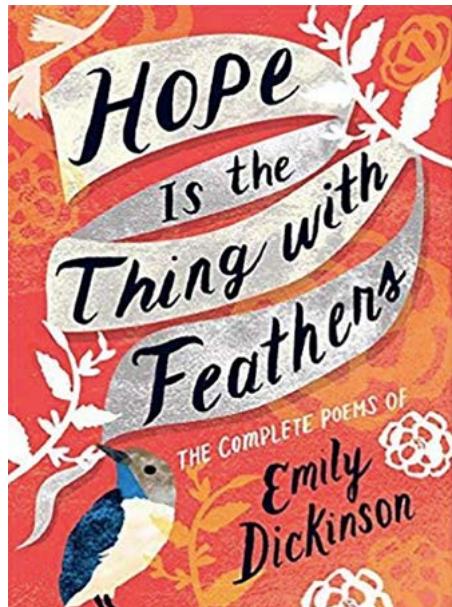
In her beautiful poem "Hope" is the thing with feathers," Dickinson explores the power of hope and what

it means to us as humans. In the first stanza, she introduces hope as a bird that "perches in the soul" and forever keeps us company to bear us through difficult days. In the second stanza, Dickinson emphasizes how only the most terrible situations could cause hope to falter, though hope becomes an even greater comfort to us when life is at its most difficult (a "gale" is a strong wind, while "abash" is to make someone disconcerted). Finally, in the last stanza, Dickinson brings home her message of how hope is always with us without ever costing us anything, no matter how difficult or dangerous something may be.

I love this poem first and foremost for its message, and then for its structure and wording, which is also beautiful. The poem isn't very long, but its message is still clear and potent. The rhythm of the words flows smoothly, and the words themselves are simple. I love how Dickinson feels no need to overstretch herself with elaborate and showy writing, and instead chooses to relay her message as simply as possible, which brings me closer to the poem and only heightens the impact of her message.

Dickinson is well known for the seemingly hidden meanings and complex symbolism in her work. Though this particular poem of hers is relatively simple, I, like Dickinson and

her “hidden” meanings, have a hidden reason for sharing this particular poem with you today. “Hope’ is the thing with feathers” is, without doubt, an extraordinary, thought-provoking work that showcases poetry at its best. But that’s not the only reason I chose to review it. In a time when the world increasingly has to deal with problems both large and small, from climate change to warfare to poverty to politics, it’s more important than ever to remember the message of this poem: hope can carry us through the darkest of storms, and even when all else has abandoned us, hope never will. And I hope (yes, I hope) that you will remember it, for hope never stops—at all.



Gibbs Smith: Layton, Utah, 2019; originally published in 1891, believed to have been written in 1861.

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST: THE COLLECTED POEMS, COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002.

From choosing what clothes we wear to the career path we devote our lives to, life will always be full of choices.

“The Road Not Taken,” by Robert Frost, is a poem that describes a traveler who encounters a fork in a road in a forest. Presenting him with a choice between two paths, the poem digs deep into the nature of making choices.

“The Road Not Taken” has a melancholy yet peaceful tone to it. Through the description of yellow leaves, I assume that the season is autumn, when vibrantly colored leaves would be falling around the speaker, blanketing the path. The poem has a peaceful sadness emanating throughout, as the speaker laments being unable to experience both roads. In his indecision, he tells himself that he will follow the other path another day, but then adds, “Yet knowing how way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back.” In the end, he predicts telling the story of his choice with a sigh, wondering what would have happened if he had chosen differently.

Robert Frost wrote this poem for his friend and fellow poet Edward Thomas as a joke, because, on their frequent walks together, Thomas was extremely indecisive about which route they should take. No matter what

road they took in the end, Thomas would always regret that they had not taken another path, convinced that it would have led to better sights and better places.

In my mind, this poem is not just about the traveler and his walk through the woods. In fact, picking a path through a forest is not such an important decision. But that decision is a metaphor for many of the life-changing choices people have to make in their “walk” through life. Whether you’re traveling through the woods or simply navigating through life, you have to set your eyes on a destination.

I think the poem is telling us that we should think through all of our options, as it will impact the very direction of our journeys. There’s no point in concocting a million “what ifs.” Every choice you make should bring you closer to that destination. If you’ve made a wrong turn and there’s no going back, just learn from that mistake and stay focused on the destination. Regrets don’t change reality. What will change reality is your determination and how hard you work toward that ideal destination.

Reviewed by
Alicia Xin, 13
Scarsdale, NY



Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

by Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST: THE COLLECTED POEMS, COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002.

In the spring of 2017, I traveled with my father as he was doing research on the former death camps in eastern Poland. Driving back to Lublin, we made a stop in the Renaissance city of Zamość. In the central square, we came upon an old man in a feather hat and high boots standing next to a gray horse and carriage. The coachman offered to take us around.

"I'm the last coachman of Zamość," he declared.

Curious, I asked: "What do you mean?"

The old coachman replied in Polish, which I could understand, more or less, because I speak Russian: "I'm an old stupid man still to be driving this horse and buggy."

His words carried me back across the ocean to my native New England. The ride in the old-fashioned carriage at dusk brought to mind the second stanza of one of my favorite poems by the great American poet Robert Frost:

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

The 48-year-old Frost wrote this melodic poem in Shaftsbury, Vermont, in 1922 and included it in his collection *New Hampshire*. The poem captures a person's travels through the

night—and through the unknown. The speaker stops to rest in the alluring quietness of the night. This scene in the poem shows the speaker's peculiar behavior in front of the "little horse." The speaker seeks a break from his commitments and obligations ("promises") in life.

The poem continues:

Whose woods these are I think I
know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

The question that has been soaring in my head is: Whose woods are these? Who is the greater "he" in the poem? Is it a person—a farmer or a simple peasant boy? "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep," states the speaker in the final stanza. I wonder again, to whom are these promises given? They could be promised to a specific person or a soul, to God or a higher power, or even to art itself.

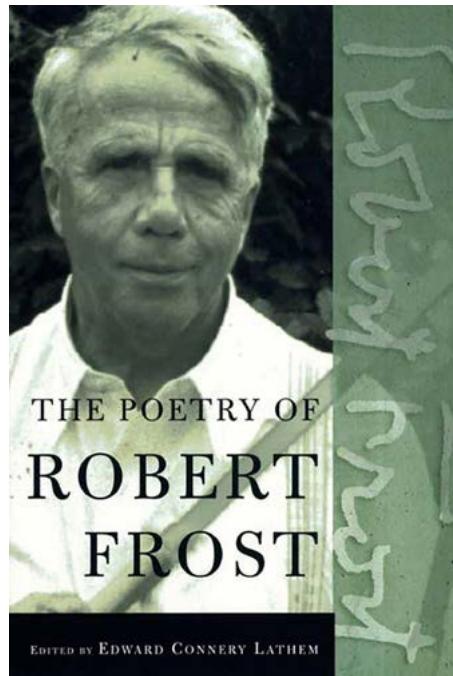
To accomplish his meaningful tasks, Frost organized the poem in deceptively simple stanzas with rhymes that travel through the poem like a trotting horse through the woods. The rhyming conjures up the poem's central theme. In the first three stanzas, the rhyme of the

Reviewed by
Tatiana Rebecca Shrayer, 11
Brookline, MA



third line becomes the main rhyme of the first, second, and fourth lines in the following stanza: *here* in the first becomes *queer*, *near*, and *year* in the second. In the final, fourth stanza the whole poem comes together by employing the same rhyme throughout: *deep/keep/sleep/sleep*.

Why is this poem called one of the best in the 20th century? I think the poem is like an earring that was lost and later found. It shows human nature simplified into little pieces waiting to be discovered. Frost's poem invites but does not force the reader to keep his or her own promises to people, and to the world.



Henry Holt: New York, 2002; originally published in 1923.

Nothing Gold Can Stay

by Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST: THE COLLECTED POEMS, COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002.

Reviewed by
Maya Wolfford, 13
Cincinnati, OH



I first came across Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" two-and-a-half years ago, nestled in a copy of S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders*. To this day, I have every word of the poem memorized. It is a quick poem that says so much in so little. It combines powerful figurative language and a deeper meaning, crafts beautiful imagery, and creates a fluid sound pattern.

First, anyone who likes the outdoors and outdoor writing will enjoy "Nothing Gold Can Stay." Every line of the poem relates to some sort of item in nature: Frost touches on the Garden of Eden, the sky, and the earth.

With the second line ("Her hardest hue to hold"), Frost also personifies nature as someone struggling to hold onto her prettiest hues in her early hours. Though there are a number of possible readings for this line, it is easily comparable to children in their innocent years: an individual is guiltless and pure early on, which is the "gold" of life, yet innocence is something that stays "only so an hour."

After all, as Frost points out, everything ends. Eventually, a golden flower must join the other flowers on the ground, when "dawn goes down to day." While it is sad that every good thing can't last forever, Frost uses dawn and day instead of day and night to show that there are hopes for the

future. He still manages to make the poem optimistic.

Through minimal words, Frost still forms a beautiful scene. His imagery, though confined to just eight lines and forty words, allows any reader to see spring. I imagined a sunshine-yellow daffodil ("Nature's first green is gold") bloom, then wilt. I imagined a violet twilight turn into blackness, ending the dawn. Each word in the poem has a purpose and together forms a visual that any reader can see.

What I love the most about this poem is its number of powerful words. Additionally, the couplet rhyming scheme and similar syllable count in each line give the poem a watery flow. The words and sounds form a cohesive work, instead of a choppy, peppery, scattered slew of letters.

When I first read the poem, I never imagined it would have such an effect on me. "Nothing Gold Can Stay" is a golden piece that any reader would enjoy as it appeals to a wide audience through a gorgeous combination of descriptive words, a layer that is deeper than just a picture, and its concise but nice phonetic pattern. And for all these reasons, I think this poem can stay.

This is Just to Say

by William Carlos Williams

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

*"This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams, from THE COLLECTED POEMS:
VOLUME I, 1909-1939, ©1938 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by
permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.*

Reviewed by
Twyla Coburn, 13
Portland, OR



“This is Just to Say” is a wonderful and detailed imagist poem by William Carlos Williams. After it was published in 1934, it became one of Williams’s most popular poems.

With only 28 words and no continuous rhyme scheme, no meter, and no punctuation, “This Is Just to Say” captures an innocent apology for eating “the plums that were in the icebox,” and yet it could mean much more. While many believe that the poem was a note written by Williams to his wife after indeed eating the plums that were in the icebox, others believe that the poem could represent a premature death of a loved one. The plums, while once here and being saved for breakfast, have now been eaten and no longer, well, exist. They are gone. This poem has been interpreted by many, and not one interpretation has been agreed upon. That is part of the beauty of this poem: it is an experience for each reader alone. One reader may see the poem as nothing more than an apology, and another could find another meaning within. The two might never agree, but for each, the meaning of the poem is theirs. That is the way in which we can all connect with this, or any, poem; it can be ours.

The speaker of the poem (either Williams or simply a fictional narrator), who is also responsible for eating the

plums, explains the simple reasons for their temptation and ultimate consumption of the plums despite the fact they were (probably) being saved for breakfast. This tells us how much the writer wanted the plums, and how could we blame him? Many people would probably have done the same had they been faced with choosing between eating cold plums now versus allowing them to be saved for later. Nevertheless, the narrator asks for forgiveness. We can wonder what kind of guilt the plums have finally brought the narrator and hope that it was not too much. This poem allows us to connect with the narrator in hopes that he has not come to regret happily eating the sweet plums.

This poem, while lacking length, holds much more. It holds a strong connection with the imagination. With only the words “they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold,” we are able to picture and feel the plums Williams so simply and yet vividly describes. We can picture the plums, the icebox, the note. This short poem has a never-ending ability to inspire the pictures that we can create in our minds. Williams’s considerate apology is everyone’s place for imagination.

Not only does this poem inspire imagination, but it inspires our senses. “Delicious,” “sweet,” and “cold” are all we need to feel the plums. The word

“delicious” fills the mouth, much like plums and the word “plum” itself. Speaking the word “delicious” takes everything of the speaking mouth which is overwhelmed by the dynamic spectrum of movement the word requires. Eating plums requires much maneuvering of the mouth as well. Slowing the quick push intended to work through the skin is the first task, and carefully working around the pit is next. Speaking the word “delicious” takes a similar effort. We move through the “d” to immediately slow to prepare for the climactic “-licious” that we move through with great care. Now, I am not saying that Williams deliberately picked the word “delicious” because speaking it is similar to eating a plum (instead of picking the word because it is one of the more impactful ways of saying that something tastes good), but I can suggest that it certainly inspires the senses and helps the feeling of eating plums reach the reader.

“This is Just to Say” is a great poem—especially as far as poems with fewer than 30 words go!

The Collected Poems of **William Carlos Williams**

Volume I • 1909-1939

Edited by A. Walton Litz & Christopher MacGowan

New Directions: New York, 1991; originally published in 1934.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

by Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF WALLACE STEVENS: THE CORRECTED EDITION, edited by John N Serio and Chris Beyers, New York: Vintage, 2015.

Reviewed by
Sabrina Guo, 13
Oyster Bay, NY



Wallace Stevens was an American modernist poet who was born in Pennsylvania in 1879. He worked as an executive for an insurance company in Connecticut, but when he had free time, his imagination took over, and he wrote beautiful poems. In 1954, he wrote "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," a gorgeous poem that describes a blackbird on windy days and in cold seasons. Each of the 13 short stanzas shows one perspective of the blackbird without giving the reader any background story. Instead, the poet intertwines imagery, musical terms, and euphoric sounds to engage and encourage the reader to dive deeper when interpreting the poem.

What I like the most about the poem is the imagery, which replaces a strict storyline. Imagery, in any form of literature, is very powerful because it allows the reader to place herself within the scene that's being described. With imagery, descriptions are much more intriguing and vivid to the reader. For example, the lines "At the sight of blackbirds / Flying in a green light" gave me the warm and magical feeling of traveling through sunlight filtered between green leaves.

There are also less straightforward images in the poem that left me entranced and contemplating the meaning of each line. For instance, when I read, "When the blackbird flew out of

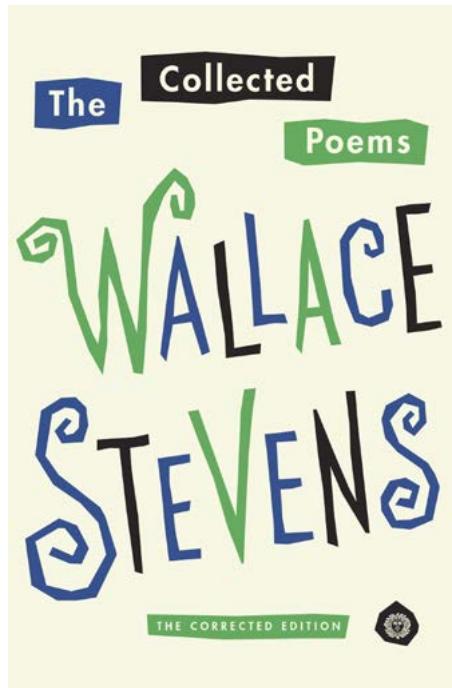
sight, / It marked the edge / Of one of many circles," I didn't know how to interpret it at first. But then I thought of the last two lines of the previous stanza, "... the blackbird is involved / In what I know." This made me think of the bird flying into the narrator's mind and leaving a mark on him, one of the many things he will carry with him in his life.

Along with the imagery, the fifth stanza really stuck out to me because I am a violinist. It reads, "I do not know which to prefer, / The beauty of inflections / Or the beauty of innuendoes, / The blackbird whistling / Or just after." In music, an inflection is a change in pitch, which can be achieved by doing vibrato—that is, creating an echoing sound that makes the note a hundred times livelier. On the other hand, an innuendo is the aftermath of an increase or decrease in volume. It's like the whisper that comes through half-open windows, the sound of wind through curtains. As a musician, I loved how the blackbird is portrayed as a very delicate instrument, and it helped me appreciate the bird's song in a way I hadn't before.

But it's not just musical terms that give this poem its melodic feeling. The poet also uses phrases that sound like what they describe, which gives the poem a fun edge. For example, the

first stanza reads, “Among twenty snowy mountains, / The only moving thing / Was the eye of the blackbird.” When you read this out loud, the phrase, “twenty snowy mountains,” actually sounds like the mountain peaks because the words’ stresses move up and down at a quick pace. Say it out loud, you’ll see! Also, in the line, “The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds,” the words “whirled” and “winds” capture the sound of circular gusts of wind.

As a whole, this poem is packed with graceful imagery and interesting sounds, which left me in a trance after reading it. The writing conveys many feelings and effects: stillness, playfulness, mystery, and nostalgia. Because the poem’s meaning isn’t straightforward, it pushes readers to ask themselves questions about what the blackbird symbolizes and encourages readers to discover its many meanings. So I want to ask you: what do you think? How do you interpret this poem? What do you think the blackbird means in each stanza?



Vintage: New York, 2015; originally published in 1954.

One Art

by Elizabeth Bishop

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

"One Art" from POEMS by Elizabeth Bishop. Previously published in THE COMPLETE POEMS 1927-1979 by Elizabeth Bishop. Copyright © 1979, 1983 by Alice Helen Methfessel. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Reviewed by
Kate Choi, 14
Seoul, Korea



We've all lost something at some point in our lives, from keys to wallets to homework assignments. Sometimes we lose bigger things: memories, people. Some of us have lost loved ones: grandparents and siblings, parents and friends. Some of us lose ourselves.

Loss—all of these kinds of loss—are central to Elizabeth Bishop's poem "One Art." In it, Bishop describes how she loses one thing after another, beginning with trivial objects like keys and building up to larger losses: houses, rivers, a continent. A loved one. Those losses, she tells us, were "no disaster," but as the poem goes on, we come to wonder if she really means it as she repeats that "the art of losing isn't hard to master."

Elizabeth Bishop was a leading American poet in the 20th century. Though she wrote many extraordinary poems during her life, "One Art" is easily Bishop's most well-known work, and in my opinion, it is her greatest. What starts off as an observation of loss and a plaintive refusal to recognize that loss is disaster ends with an anguished, heartbreakingly denial that even the loss of "you" could have been a disaster.

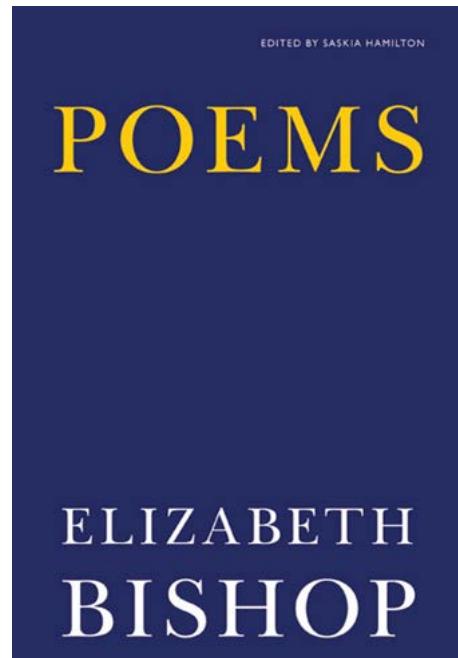
Throughout her life, Bishop herself endured countless losses, beginning in infancy when she lost her father (she wasn't even a year old). In her

grief, her mother fell into depression and had to be hospitalized when Bishop was five. Bishop then grew up afflicted with asthma and spent her childhood alternating between the care of various relatives. As an adult, Bishop lost one lover to death, and at the time of writing "One Art," she had just separated from another longtime lover, a younger woman named Alice. In response, Bishop rapidly wrote out 17 drafts of a single poem in less than a month, a first for her, since she usually spent months perfecting and revising her work. The result was "One Art," a tremendously beautiful and heartbreakingly read.

"One Art" begins with its most famous line: "The art of losing isn't hard to master." Bishop starts off slowly, reassuring us that misplaced keys and wasted time are only small losses and encouraging us to practice losing: "Lose something every day," she writes. She tells us what else she has lost, things that gradually start to seem less and less trivial: the loss of her mother's watch, her house, her memories. Still, these losses are not disasters. Here the reader begins to realize that Bishop might not take these losses so lightly after all, though she so bravely pretends otherwise, as she describes the losses of "lovely" cities, continents, and realms, which (she claims) are still not disasters.

But then she reaches the final stanza, arguably the most important one in the poem. Here is where the twist is. The dash before this stanza makes it seem to be almost a postscript, an addition that couldn't be held back. “—Even losing you,” Bishop writes here, revealing that the poem is being written for a certain person: “It’s evident that the art of losing’s not too hard to master / though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.” This very last line exposes to us the true nature of Bishop’s immense struggle to cope with her loss, despite her repeated assurances otherwise. “(*Write it!*),” she commands herself; those two words are the only ones in the entire poem where her true pain is revealed to the reader, leaving us feeling just as torn as she is.

The best thing about “One Art”—the thing that, in my eyes, makes it so powerful—is how human it is. As Bishop herself once put it, “One Art” is “pure emotion.” It approaches loss in a way completely novel, yet so familiar to any of us who have lost something we treasured. Though the speaker continues to deny that loss is any disaster, it is evident that the opposite is true, and that is what makes this poem so compelling. It is deep and powerful, simple but complex. To me, “One Art” is exactly what poetry is at its best, laying bare not only the human mind, but the human heart, however agonizing it may be.



Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2011; originally published in 1976.

Honor Roll

Welcome to the Stone Soup Honor Roll. Every month we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

Fiction

Dora Fields, 11
Jasmine Kang, 11
Irina Kolarova, 12
Sean Lee, 13
Julia Marcus, 12
Izzy Martin, 13
Andres Lopez Perez-Lete, 10
Reese Caroline Stirlen, 10

Poetry

E.K. Baer, 11
Kira Brown, 8
Ariana Daya, 10
Rithika Kangath, 6
Otys Train, 9

Art

Max Fang, 7
Natalie Johnson, 13

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