

## Selected Children's Literature Vividly Depicting Various Themes Relating to the Christian Life

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(stars indicate varying levels of excellence/profundity/memorableness)

### Learning to Share:

*The Rainbow Fish*, Marcus Pfister (N.Y.: North-South Books, 1992) - about an exceptionally beautiful fish who learns to share his rainbow scales; at a quite elementary level

### Courage/Bravery:

- \*\* *Mirette on the High Wire*, Emily Arnold McCully (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992) - a girl of about 12 learns to walk the high wire and dramatically helps a high wire veteran overcome his fear to go back on the wire
- \*\* *The King's Fountain*, by Lloyd Alexander (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971) - a great tale of humble bravery
- \* *Desert December*, by Dorian Haarhoff (New York: Clarion Books [Houghton Mifflin], 1992) - a Christmas tale set in southwest Africa, in which a ten-year old boy, with his grandfather's permission, travels alone into the desert to find his parents in a mining village
- \*\*\* *The Bravest Dog Ever - The True Story of Balto*, by Natalie Standiford (an Alaskan husky and his dogsled driver heroically bring life-saving medicine to Nome, Alaska, through a raging blizzard)
- \* *To the Top! Climbing the World's Highest Mountain*, by S. A. Kramer (the true story, dramatically and briefly told, of Sir Edmund Hillary's and Tenzing Norgay's ascent of Mt. Everest in 1953)
- \*\* *The Emperor and the Kite*, by Jane Yolen (a quiet, brave little princess rescues her father from a prison-tower)
- \*\* *The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter*, Arielle N. Olson (a girl of about 12 bravely keeps the lighthouse light burning during a long winter storm)
- \*\* *Clara Barton*, by Rae Bains (her true story, focusing on her childhood; she showed remarkable courage and vision as she overcame great shyness to dramatically serve her fellow man)
- \*\* *Ride on the Wind*, by Alice Dalgliesh (a wonderful recounting of Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927)

## **Courage and Repentance**

\*\*\* *The Rag Coat*, by Lauren Mills (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991) - a beautiful story set in Appalachia, about a poor eight year old girl who gets terribly teased by her schoolmates over her first coat, made of rags contributed by neighborhood ladies and sewn together by them; when she bravely returns to the school and tells the stories about the rags, there is great repentance by her schoolmates.

\*\*\* *The Royal Bee*, by Frances and Ginger Park (Honesdale, Pa.: Boyds Mills Press, 2000) - a very poor Korean boy is so determined to learn to read and write, he stands outside the school, which is only for rich boys, day after day, and wins the support of his teacher and the students (based on a true story).

\* *The Boy Who Held Back the Sea*, retold by Lenny Hart, with magnificent oil paintings by Thomas Locker (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1987) - a mischievous boy learns responsibility unexpectedly when he realizes it's up to him to block the hole in the dike until help arrives.

## **Patient Endurance; Steady Faith; Victory over tribulation:**

\*\* *The Little Boat*, K. Henderson (at an early elementary level)

\*\*\* *The Long Winter*, Laura Ingalls Wilder (a pioneer family living in a new town on the South Dakota prairie survives a seven-month winter filled with blizzards)

\*\*\* *More than Anything Else*, Marie Bradley (beautifully and poignantly describes how Booker T. Washington learned to read at about the age of 10)

\*\*\* *The Miracle of Saint Nicholas*, by Gloria Whelan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997) - beautifully done; about a church in a Russian village being reopened after sixty years, through the initiative of a ten-year old boy, and by the patient faith of the whole village

\*\* *Wanda's Roses*, by Pat Brisson (Honesdale, Pa.: Boyd Mills Press, 1998) - a girl's faith in a scraggly bush inspires a whole neighborhood to beautify their surroundings

\* *When the Monkeys Came Back*, by Kristine L. Franklin (after the rainforest is chopped down near her home, a woman plants trees her whole life, to woo the monkeys back)

\*\*\* *Miss Rumphius*, by Barbara Cooney (an old woman in New England finds joy in spreading lupine seeds everywhere!)

\*\* *The Glorious Flight - Across the Channel with Louis Bleriot*, by Alice and Martin Provensen (about the first solo flight across the English Channel, in 1909, and about building the plane that made the flight)

\*\* *Eleanor*, by Barbara Cooney (based on the true story of Eleanor Roosevelt's difficult childhood)

\*\* *Dragon in the Rocks*, the true story about the English girl of about 12 who chipped

- out and assembled a great dinosaur skeleton in the early 19th century; another version of this story is *Rare Treasures, Mary Anning*, by Don Brown
- \*\*\* *A Little Princess*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett (a young girl from a wealthy family humbly and heroically endures the scorn, hatred, and jealousy of the headmistress - and some of the other students - at her English boarding school)
- The Little Match Girl*, by Hans Christian Andersen (a young girl from an impoverished family freezes to death as she faithfully sells matches on a city street)

**Patient, enduring love:**

- \*\* *Silver At Night*, S.C. Bartoletti (a very touching story about an immigrant from Italy working in the coal mines of northeastern Pennsylvania, slowly earning enough money to send for his girlfriend/fiancee back in Italy)

**Willingness to sacrifice for others:**

- \*\* *Leah's Pony*, Elizabeth Friedrich (a girl of about 11 is willing to sell her beloved pony so her nearly bankrupt farm-family will not have to lose their farm)
- \*\*\* *The Black Falcon*, by William Wise (retold from Boccaccio's *Decameron*); illustrated by Gillian Barlow (New York: Philomel Books, 1990)
- \* *Miss Fanny's Hat*, by Jan Karon (a plucky 100-year-old becomes willing to offer her favorite hat for her church's fund-raising auction)

**Good triumphing over evil; Truth triumphing over falsehood:**

- \*\*\* *Papa Gatto*, by Ruth Sanderson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995) - very beautiful story and pictures

**Learning to accept sad circumstances:**

- \* *Letting Swift River Go*, by Jane Yolen (a ten-year-old girl learns to accept the flooding of her hometown and the whole valley when Swift River is dammed to form a huge lake to provide water for Boston)

**Thankfulness; expressing gratitude:**

- \*\* *Pages of Music*, by Tony Johnston, and illustrated by Tomie de Paola (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1988) - a composer always remembers a summer he spent as a boy on the island of Sardinia, and he returns there one Christmas morning with a magnificent gift of music
- \*\* *Silver Packages*, Cynthia Rylant (N.Y.: Orchard Books, 1997); based on the true

story of the Christmas Train coming to the Appalachian Mountains every Christmas beginning in 1943; one of the children who received a present each year returns to his Appalachian hometown years later to serve as a medical doctor  
*O Christmas Tree!* about Christmas in the Caribbean  
*What a Wonderful Day to Be a Cow*, by Carolyn Lesser  
*Merry Christmas, Old Armadillo*, by Larry Dane Brimner, and illustrated by Dominic Catalano

### **Industriousness; Cheerful Cooperation:**

*The Boxcar Children* series, by Gertrude Chandler Warner (examples of cooperative, hard-working, virtuous children - though perhaps taken to an unrealistic extreme)

### **Joy of friendship:**

*Best Friends Together Again*, Aliko

\*\* *Betsy-Tacy and Tib*, by Maud Hart Lovelace (N.Y.: HarperTrophy, 1979; originally published in 1941) - a first novel, about 5 year olds; very delightful and insightful; set in Wisconsin around 1900

\* *The Milly-Molly-Mandy Story Book*, by Joyce L. Brisley (N.Y.: Kingfisher, 1996; originally published in 1928) - another delightful first novel; and the sequel, *More Milly-Molly-Mandy* (set in an English village and the surrounding countryside)

\* *Amber on the Mountain*, by Tony Johnston, with paintings by Robert Duncan (New York: Puffin Books [Penguin], 1994) - about the special friendship of two girls about eight or nine years old; set in Appalachia

*Tanya and Emily*, by Patricia Lee Gauch

### **A child's growing appreciation for a grandparent or other elderly person:**

\* *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)*, by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard, with paintings by James Ransome (N.Y.: Clarion Books, 1991) - about an elderly black auntie relating stories about her life in Baltimore (each hat inspires a different story)

\* *Oliver, Amanda, and Grandmother Pig*, by Jean Van Leeuwen (the youngsters gain a whole new appreciation for their grandmother)

\* *The Patchwork Quilt*, by Valerie Flournoy (a dying grandmother is helped by her young granddaughter in making a patchwork quilt full of memories)

*Willie and May*, by Judith Schachner

### **Repentance; Overcoming selfishness and self-centeredness:**

\*\*\* *Candy Floss*, by Rumer Godden; illustrated by Nonny Hogrogian (New York:

- Philomel Books, 1991; first published in 1959); a powerful story about the profound repentance of a very spoiled girl of seven; set in England at a coconut shy booth at a traveling country fair
- \* *Miss Hickory*, by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey (a novel about a figurine made of hardwood who learns painfully not to be so hardheaded)
  - King Midas and the Golden Touch*, a new edition by Charlotte Craft, and illustrated by K. Y. Craft (beautifully done)
  - The Bad Hat*, by Ludwig Bemelmans (in the *Madeline* series)
  - \* *Zinnia and Dot*, by Lisa Campbell Ernst (a humorous tale of two bickering hens who finally put aside their squabbles to heroically drive away the weasel who is after their eggs)

### **Repentance; Overcoming embarrassment about one's weaknesses:**

- \*\* *Read for Me, Mama*, by Vashanti Rahaman (Honesdale, Pa.: Boyds Mills Press, 1997) - a young mother is too ashamed to admit to her 6 or 7 year old son that she cannot read

### **Dealing with a troublesome gang; starting "a good gang":**

- \* *More Milly-Molly-Mandy*, by Joyce L. Brisley (ch. 5)

### **Learning the hard way from yielding to passions/temptations:**

- \*\* *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame (1908), ch. 1 (Mole insists on paddling the boat, and capsizes it)
- \*\* *By the Banks of Plum Creek*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder (when Laura goes to the flooded river and is almost swept away after she ventures in just to see how it feels)
  - \* *The Story about Ping*, by Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wise (N.Y.: Puffin/Penguin, 1977; originally published in 1933) - a little duck gets lost on the Yangtze River in China after deciding not to return to his houseboat where he will be punished for being late
- \* *Frog and Toad Together*, Arnold Lobel (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) - the chapter about Toad on stage, getting carried away with thoughts of fame and grandeur
- \*\* *Peter Rabbit, Mr. Samuel Whiskers (or The Roly-Poly Pie)*, and some others by Beatrix Potter - dangerous consequences for over-curiosity and disobedience
- \*\* *The Hundred Dresses*, by Eleanor Estes (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1972) - very powerful lessons about peer pressure, and not making fun of people; first published in 1944
- Miss Penny and Mr. Grubbs*, by Lisa Campbell Ernst (a gardener is nearly consumed by jealousy over his neighbor's thriving garden, and everything he tries to do to subvert her success backfires)

### **Accepting/loving those who are different:**

- \*\* *Chicken Sunday*, by Patricia Polacco (N.Y.: Philomel Books [Putnam and Grosset Group], 1992) – a delightful story about a Ukrainian Orthodox girl of about ten who is close friends with two black boys; she comes to deeply appreciate the love and faith of the boys' very devout Baptist grandmother, who sang the church hymns with a voice “like slow thunder and sweet rain”

### **General Christian Themes - Faith, Kindness, Inner Illumination, Transfiguration:**

- \*\*\* *Rechenka's Eggs*, by Patricia Polacco (set in Orthodox Russia)
- \*\*\* *Uncle Vova's Tree*, by Patricia Polacco (a touching story about Russian Orthodox immigrants to America)
- \*\*\* *The Velveteen Rabbit*, original text by Margery Williams, and original art by William Nicholson (New York: Doubleday, 1991) - an all-time, very touching classic about a stuffed animal who becomes "real"
- \*\*\*\* *The Princess and the Goblin*, and *The Princess and Curdy*, by George MacDonald (magnificent tales with much spiritual wisdom)
- \*\*\*\* *The Narnia Chronicles*, by C. S. Lewis (incomparable allegorical tales with deeply Christian content, with four English schoolchildren as the heroes and heroines)
- \*\* *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*, by Susan Wojciechowski, and illustrated by P. J. Lynch (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1995) - about the inner transformation of a gloomy woodcarver
- \* *A Lion for the King*, by Meryl Doney (a young Chinese boy and a wise man follow the star in the West, leading them to the Christ-Child)

### **Finding one's calling/vocation in life:**

- \* *Hatti and the Wild Waves*, Barbara Cooney (about a girl of about 12 who gains courage to pursue her dreams)
- \*\* *Boris and His Balalaika*, by Esphyr Slobodkina (London and New York: Abelard Schuman, 1964) - a very poor Orthodox boy finds his calling in life playing his father's balalaika in the Russian army
- \*\* *Snowflake Bentley*, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (the true story of a Vermont farmboy who devotes his life to making photographs of snowflakes)

### **Doing What One Is Good At for God, No Matter What It Is**

- \*\* *The Clown of God*, retold and illustrated by Tomie DePaola (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1978) - at the end of his life, a juggler gives his best for God.

### **Selfless Kindness**

- \* *The Cobbler's Reward*, by Barbara and Ewa Reid (New York: MacMillan, 1978) - based on a Polish folk tale about a young man who breaks a witch's spell and rescues a maiden, with dramatic help from some animals and insects whom he has helped; many folktales have this basic theme, such as:
- \* *Androcles and the Lion*, retold by Tom Paxton - a runaway slave helps a lion, who helps him in return in a time of desperate need

### **Nature's Harmony; God's Providential Care for All:**

- \* *The Wonderful Feast*, Esphyr Slobodkina (N.Y.: Greenwillow Books, 1993; originally published in 1955) - quite a number of creatures end up getting fed from the feed a farmer gives to his horse; at a quite elementary level
- \* *Ice Bear and Little Fox*, by Jonathan London, with illustrations by Daniel San Souci (N.Y.: Dutton's Children's Books [Penguin Putnam], 1998) - tells the story of the mutually helpful relationship between a silver fox and a polar bear through the year; includes a glossary of Inuit (Eskimo) words and other terms relating to the Arctic, and an afterword giving more information about Arctic wildlife

### **Remarkable examples of Providential care in one's life - God's Miraculous Protection and Guidance:**

- \*\*\* *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, by Maria Augusta Trapp (original edition published by Lippincott, in Philadelphia, in 1949) – the amazing true story that is the basis for the play and movie called *The Sound of Music*