

Wiggins, Bradley with Fotheringham, William

My Story

Red Fox, 2013, pp252, £6.99
978 1 849 41934 5

I have to admit that I was not interested in reading biography as a child nor indeed as a young adult but I am sure that some young people are attracted and the existing celebrity culture certainly makes biography, often autobiography, a major part of current publishing. This is a children's edition, somewhat abridged, of an existing autobiography and it is superbly presented. The bulk of the book is the narrative of his cycling career; it opens with his childhood but quickly moves into competitive cycling and then details his rise, his problems and of course his great success of 2012.

However, what I appreciated and I think will be particularly valued by a teenage fan is the pictures, charts, maps, diagrams which are interspersed. This serves to illuminate the details but also to break up the text for those who might be daunted by 200+ pages of unbroken text. Of course the mature reader can easily stick to the narrative but the option for variety exists in a way that is less common in adult publishing.

Bradley Wiggins, winner of the Tour de France, was one of the icons of the London Olympics and all that 2012 stood for in British Sport; to exploit that and introduce those heroes into the library is almost a duty of a good school librarian.

Nick Hunt

Woolf, Alex

An Asteroid Strike (A World After...)

Raintree, 2013, pp56, £15.99
978 1 406 26091 5

This is one of a four book series imagining life after a calamity or disastrous event. Here after a prologue, a meteor strike is described (Russia, February 2013). This is followed by information on asteroids and comets. Chapters on 'Impact', 'Chaos and panic', 'Cold and dark', are followed by a more positive 'What can we do?'

The overall tone tries to be positive and assures the reader nothing like this will happen for hundreds of years, (not sure how the companion books on nuclear disaster and super-plague cope with that!). Finally there is a suggested plan for writing your own story, a timeline and a glossary. It should be noted that the timeline runs from 6 April 2020 to 2040 when all will be well again! Some facts and explanations are highlighted in boxes and the text is well laid out giving a user-friendly look to a difficult subject. Certainly for 14 to 16-year-olds, the glossary, resources list and index will aid research into an intriguing topic but the overall tone of the book is reassuring – it only happens every 600,000 years or so!

Delvene A. Barnett

Literature

Bradshaw, Graham

The Connell Guide to Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'

Connell Guides, 2012, pp120, £6.99
978 1 907776 05 2

This is one of a series pocket sized guides to works of literature, including other plays by Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost*, *The Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby*. It is attractively presented, the text interspersed with photographs from different productions as well as brief sections, coloured blue, giving information such as 'key quotes' from the play, short quotations from critics and, somewhat arbitrarily, 'ten facts about *The Tempest*.' In this, along with a chronology, summary of the plot and an act by act synopsis, it resembles other guides currently on the market, but there the resemblance stops. The body of the book consists of a series of very interesting essays on textual, contextual and critical issues posed as questions: a summary of themes leads us into 'What does the play tell us about power?', and thence to 'If *The Tempest* is so sceptical about power, why did James I. like it?', questions raised here being pursued by looking at post-colonialist interpretations and culminating in the final piece: 'So what view of the world does 'Shakespeare leave us with?' There are fascinating pieces on Prospero, Caliban and Miranda, as well as a section on Shakespeare's language. Because of the brevity of these pieces and the guide as a whole, many questions are begged and much has to be taken as read, but it certainly has the merit of provoking thought. Sir Peter Hall is quoted on the front of the guide as calling it 'The perfect introduction to *The Tempest*', but it would possibly be better categorised as a companion, most useful after, rather than before, an initial reading or viewing.

Frank Startup

Poetry

Agard, John

Travel Light Travel Dark

Bloodaxe, 2013, pp96, £9.95
978 1 85224 991 5

In March, John Agard was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry, and now comes a new collection to illustrate how justified that award was. Agard's poetry has been read and loved by students via its inclusion in GCSE anthologies, and they will be familiar with his wry, oblique look at the details of British life and his conflation of Caribbean and British, particularly English, culture. This book casts its multi-cultural net even further afield in a variety of references and correspondences, a commentary in dialect on a cricket match between Prospero and Caliban, for

example, or Charon, 'the after-life's middle man', ferrying souls across the Thames while Theseus writes home from the Barbican. The collection opens with ten short poems celebrating colours, and then moves to a magnificent 'Water Music of a Different Kind'. In which George the First's coronation on the Thames to the strains of Handel links to the waters of the mid-Atlantic trade, the sound of slave chains and drums making a juxtaposition which Agard, with his customary steely tact, never overplays, but makes acutely uncomfortable. Handel is to re-appear later in the collection, partnered with Jimi Hendrix, a pair of ghosts in a London house which, apparently, they each inhabited at some point in their lives. Water is a recurring theme, as is the slave trade, and high points – of which there are so many – are a debate between wine and water, the saga of sugar cane, and a first person account of 'the Oak That Became a Ship', ironically introduced by a verse from the patriotic song 'Hearts of Oak', and culminating in the ship's approach to new continents on which 'conscience fell asleep', another understated piece which, nonetheless, carries highly uncomfortable truths. Short pieces carry bite as well: the 'Grand Ole Piano mama' has the cadences of the Blues, and another, six line poem, subtly, gently, devastatingly, undermines the superiority inherent in the term 'Enlightenment'. 'White Actor Prepares to be Othello' is a masterpiece. It is a magnificent collection from a writer who is at least one of our very best poets.

Frank Startup



Ivory, Helen

Waiting for Bluebeard

Bloodaxe, 2013, pp112, £9.95
978 1 85224 975 5

Helen Ivory says that her book 'tries to understand how a girl could grow up to be the woman living in Bluebeard's house'. It is divided into two parts, the first presenting aspects of the life of a child, her experiences and perceptions, and to call it a collection of poems seems something of a misnomer, as it has a narrative, chronological structure, like an autobiography. The first poem sees a pregnant woman watching the moon landing on television, while the child inside her says 'I will not budge', and, later, this child, twelve years old, with a bra padded out to fit 'the second-hand ball gown bought from the hospice fete' is seen sitting in the window of her childhood house as if waiting. The second part, bringing what she has been waiting for, deals with the abusive relationship with Bluebeard, coming for her in 'his silver-grey car', who will 'unleash wolves like rain'. She casts the same sort of spell as myth or fairy tale. The world seen through the eyes of the child is magical and