



OCTOBER, 2008

# Barb's Book Bytes



## **CLASSIC MACDONALD**

(All ages)

Margaret Read MacDonald has, once more, created a simple retelling of a classic tale. **BATS BIG GAME** (Albert Whitman '08, 9780807505878) relays the fable about a ball game between the birds and the animals. Bat wants to play for the winning team - but has trouble deciding which team that will be. As in all of Aesop's Fables Bat learns a lesson - one that young and old need to remember. The format of this delightful picture book suggests a primary grade audience but the tale is one that will work well with older students. As in all MacDonald stories this begs to be told.

## **WIRED FUTURE**

(Grades 5-8)

**CYBERIA** (Scholastic '08, 9780545027939), by Chris Lynch, is a funny science fiction story. This dystopia portrays a world in which everyone, and everything, is wired. Zane, the main character, does not even have to leave his room. His room knows his every need and provides them. Even his pet dog is wired. Zane begins to question the world in which he lives, after his pet begins talking to him about his wants, needs and the abuses which he suffers. This book does touch on some serious subjects, including pet abuse, workaholic/absent parents and Big Brother technology. It definitely is for pet lovers - and for anyone who likes to read about our possible future. The ending of this novel guarantees a sequel and Chris Lynch says it will be a series.

## **A HAUNTING STORY**

(Grades 8+)

**SIGHT** (Margaret K. McElderry, '07, 9781416906575), by Adrienne Maria Vrettos, is

good competition for the Medium television show. Dylan, the 15 year old heroine, has the **SIGHT**. Ever since kindergarten, when she gave the police important clues about the boy in her class who 'disappeared', she has been helping her home town police with abduction cases. This well written novel had me on the edge of my seat right from the first page. Highly recommended for junior high and high school readers.

## **READING CHEERLEADERS**

(K-3)

Judy Sierra and Marc Brown have once more joined forces to celebrate reading. The title of their most recent effort is **BORN TO READ** (Knopf '08, 9780375846878) and it is an exuberant advertisement for reading. The rhyming language will make this story a good choice for beginning readers. It will also be a great choice for teachers, parents and grandparents who want to promote the joys and rewards of a reading life.

## **A WONDERFUL RETELLING**

((Grades 6-10))

Shannon Hale, whose novel **PRINCESS ACADEMY** won a Newbery honor two years ago, has written another wonderful fantasy. In **BOOK OF A THOUSAND DAYS** (Bloomsbury '07, 9781599900513) she retells the little known Grimm Brothers fairy tale **Maid Maleen**. As the fly leaf on the books say this is "a completely unique telling filled with adventure and romance, drama and disguise. I highly recommend this title and Shannon Hale's web site [www.shannonhale.com](http://www.shannonhale.com) - I also recommend reading her article **How Reader Girl Got Her Groove Back** which can be found at <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6600686.html> Shannon Hale has some very important

things to say about the teaching of novels in high school and she does so with a great deal of humour. Do check her out and be sure to recommend this novel of hers to the students in your circle of influence.

***HERO WANNA BE***  
(Grades 6-9)

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, author of ***SHILOH*** and the ***ALICE*** series, has written another title. Her most recent book is ***CRICKET MAN*** (Atheneum '08, 9781416949817) and it features Kenny, a middle school aged boy, who harbours a secret desire to be a hero. He starts by rescuing the crickets in his family's swimming pool but as his confidence in his super powers increase he attempts other rescues. He runs into opposition from, among others, the school principal. The author has done a very good job of capturing the voice of a middle school boy. Kenny is someone I would want in my classroom. This is a funny down to earth story that I think will appeal to boys and girls.

***A SNOBBISH DOG***  
(Grades 4-8)

***GULLY'S TRAVELS*** (Michael Di Capua Bks '08, 9780545025065), by Tor Seidler, is a highly entertaining dog story. As the story opens Gulliver is living an upscale New York life style. He visits Paris with his owner and returns home full of himself and his special place in life. He is in for a shock. His owner has decided to marry the woman he was visiting in France and she is allergic to dogs. Gulliver is given to the doorman who lives 'on the other side of the tracks' and he begins his transition to 'Gully'. Can an upper crust dog find his way back to that life AND will he want to do so? This book holds the answer. Along with the well written story this book raises some important issues about social inclusion.

***CYBERBULLIES***  
(Grades 6+)

Dori Hillestad Butler's novel ***THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUMAN SCHOOL*** (Albert Whitman '08, 9780807580950) is a fictional account of how an online social networking tool is used to bully one

of the popular girls at Truman Middle School. Adults do worry a great deal about internet safety and this book will provide a great entry for a discussion on this topic. It also paints a picture of how our young people are using this technology - and misusing this technology. I thought it provided a very realistic picture of 'good' middle school students who can be led off the straight and narrow path. After all that is part of growing up. I was introduced to this novel through the ***ALAN Online*** book chats. The author of this title will be online Wednesday, October 22 at 6pm pacific time. Do check it out.

**NATIONAL BOOK AWARD NOMINEES**

The finalists for the National Book Award have been posted. There are five titles for young people and you can find them at the National Book Award site: <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2008.html>  
Boo hoo - I have not yet read any of them. So many books, so little time. Hopefully I will be talking about them in a forthcoming newsletter.

***A WORLD OF STORIES PROJECT***

Gumboot Books and some key Canadian authors and a key Rotary sponsor have produced ***A WORLD OF STORIES*** (Gumboot Bks '08, 9780978435110). This book is a collection of stories chosen to celebrate a number of international holidays. My favourite piece is the one written by Kari-Lynn Winters for International Literacy Day. This book is being sold to raise funds to support literacy and the publisher is offering this book as a potential fund raiser for schools and groups. This collection does contain a weakness common in most collections. The quality of the contributions is uneven. The goal of the effort, however, is admirable. Contact Crystal J. Stranaghan at Gumbook books for more information about this title. She can be reached at:  
[gumbootbooks@mac.com](mailto:gumbootbooks@mac.com)

**Happy reading all! Bookishly, Barb**

**Barb Dean**  
**Children & Teen Literature Advocate**  
**[barbdean@shaw.ca](mailto:barbdean@shaw.ca)**