

few in their right mind would ever consider. Her hope, instead, is to tell her audience what it was really like, even for the very few who actually succeeded.

Ned Turner, the tale's hero, very quickly must face the bitter realities of his quest: friends who prove untrustworthy, crooks who cheat him out of all his supplies, and a seemingly unending trail perfumed by the stench of the carcasses of dead horses. But this is not to be a story of just one boy's maturation journey, for Lawson also chronicles the life of Ned's sister Sarah, who comes to join her brother in his Yukon adventure, and of Catherine, a young girl who goes to the Klondike not to find gold but to escape her rather brutal past. Inevitably, all three stories become enmeshed into one. Though the final confrontation between Ned and Montana Jim, the villain responsible for Catherine's problems, is unfortunately foreshadowed by the cover of the text, the inevitability of the conclusion does not detract from the magnetism of the story.

Taking advantage of her present position as writer-in-residence at Burton House Writer's Retreat in Dawson City, Lawson makes the reader fully aware of the uniqueness of this "northern experience," providing a wealth of data on the actual Klondike Gold Rush as well as a wonderful selection of historical photographs that graphically portray the bitterness of the everyday life of the "cheechako," the unprepared novice. And along the way the reader also learns why the few who survived the Klondike nightmare were called "sourdoughs." Seems the yeast in sourdough bread helps prevent scurvy. Remember that the next time you go in search of gold.

The author's biography at the end of the book includes a snapshot of Lawson in her Yukon winter finery, red nose ablazing. The "cheechaka" has clearly become a "sourdough" and *Destination Gold* is the gift she provides us in celebration.

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Female Strength: Nineteenth-Century Novels

Heart and Soul: The Story of Florence Nightingale. Gena K. Gorrell. Tundra, 2000. 146 pp. \$22.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-494-0. *Earthly Astonishments.* Marthe Jocelyn. Tundra, 2000. 179 pp. \$24.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-495-9.

On the surface, these two books deal with a similar theme. Although *Heart and Soul* is a biography and *Earthly Astonishments* is a fictional novel, both works focus on heroic figures in the nineteenth century. The first tells the story of the renowned social reformer, Florence Nightingale, whose accomplishments spanned the reign of Queen Victoria and beyond; the latter narrates the tale of Little Jo-Jo, who, measured at twenty-eight inches tall, survived seemingly insurmountable odds and ultimately rose up with more dignity than most giants can muster. More importantly, both heroines grew up fearing that they were freaks.

In a superbly written and illustrated book, Gena Gorrell shows the reader how Florence Nightingale struggled with her bursting intelligence and sense of social

wrongs in a stifling home environment. Born to a wealthy and decadent family, Florence was expected to play the role of the upper-class young lady whose main concerns ought to have been refined manners, fashionable clothes, pleasing conversations, and securing a prominent husband. She rejected all of this.

Much to the chagrin of her family, and with her own tormented doubts, Florence wanted to learn and do much more than that which was deemed appropriate for her sex and class. What was wrong with her, anyway? Through accessible narrative plus fabulous pictures, illustrations, sketches, maps, and charts, Gorrell reveals the contradictions in a phenomenal individual, and the inconsistencies in a historical period that continues to fascinate us today. On the one hand, familial and societal norms prohibited Florence Nightingale from advancing to the medical or administrative career for which she would have been clearly gifted; on the other hand, desperate conditions during the Crimean War allowed her to travel to Turkey where she was credited with saving the lives of thousands of British soldiers. Young readers especially will revel in this fact-filled book which has just the right amount of succinct observation and social commentary, not least of which is the role Nightingale played in transforming the lot of nurses from a lowly and dubious occupation to a respectable profession.

The heroine in *Earthly Astonishments* did not and could not have accomplished as much. For one thing, the story of Florence Nightingale spans her long life, 90 years, whereas Little Jo-Jo is but twelve years old through most of Marthe Jocelyn's novel. Nightingale also had family wealth and connections that offered her opportunities well beyond the reaches of Little Jo-Jo who was born into poverty and sold by her father to a ruthless school mistress, from whom she escaped only to end up as part of a sideshow that exploited people's differences for profit. Young Florence craved for adventure and purpose; Josephine (Little Jo-Jo's real name) yearned for family and normalcy.

Earthly Astonishments is a good story, but perhaps it would work best as a novel study in the classroom, with thoughtful guidance from the teacher. On its own, the story of Little Jo-Jo might not get past the fantastic and bizarre images of the Alligator Man, or the Ghostly Phenomenon, or the Bearded Lady. With some judicious direction, however, the young reader could be enticed to learn more about America's Gilded Age, including women's swimwear of the period, consisting of flared skirts, puffed sleeves, sailor collars, and black stockings; inkwells in the classroom; the novelty of the telephone; superstitions and prejudices that led to Josephine's parents to believe that she was cursed, and that motivated people to gawk at her and other "freaks"; prices for common items, such as renting a bicycle for ten cents; and living conditions of the very poor.

Students could also be alerted to and prepared for the vicious name-calling and other forms of cruelty that are endemic in the novel. The stereotypes about gypsies, with their "fiery temperament" and "fondness for the tambourine" (66), should not go unchallenged either, nor should the sexism that spews out of R.J. Walters, the proprietor of the sideshow: he tells Little Jo-Jo that "If you weren't a woman, you'd make a fine businessman" (80); he addresses his audience as "My Lucky Ladies, My Clever Gentlemen" (102); and he refers to Miss MacLaren, headmistress at a girls' school, as a "bellowing harridan" (169). Finally, students could have fun with the colourful vocabulary in the book, such as lollygagging (85), scalawag (88), spondulicks (90), ballyhoo (102), and skedaddler (137).

Here, in fact, lies a fundamental difference between these two books. Perhaps because of its format as a fictional novel, *Earthly Astonishments* does not provide a solid historical context for much of its content. References are made to some people, events, and ideas of the period — most of the story takes place in 1884 Coney Island — but little background information is given to help the young reader through the harsh realities of Little Jo-Jo's marginalized and precarious existence. There is also little attempt to explain the meanings of the strange and wonderful words noted above. Such a component, unless carefully constructed, might have interfered with the flow of the narrative, but the omission makes the instructor's input all that more critical.

In contrast, *Heart and Soul* sparks with invaluable sidebars containing useful and informative details about Florence Nightingale's world, from the etiquette of death and the legal status of married women in Victorian England, to child mortality rates in the seventeenth century and the bitter rivalries between Christian churches in the 1880s. Gena Gorrell's research is commendable, and the candid presentation of her findings makes her book a joy for young and not-so-young readers alike. It is clear that the author admires her heroine, but Gorrell does not refrain from observing Florence Nightingale's bouts of selfishness and arrogance (107-08). A little more could have been said on nineteenth-century assumptions about the pre-eminence of western medical science, and about Nightingale's unquestionable support for British imperialism, for instance, but these minor criticisms pale to the overall achievement of *Heart and Soul*. Gena Gorrell's historical biography and Marthe Jocelyn's fictional novel deal with heroines who were peculiarized by opposite social and economic forces, but whereas Gorrell provides the reader with a substantial meal, Jocelyn merely whets the appetite, which is not necessarily a bad thing.

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Mystery Times Six

The Curse of Jonathan Matthew. John F. Green. Stoddart, 1997. 168 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7455-1. *Sky Lake Summer.* Peggy Dymond Leavey. Napoleon, 1999. 176 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-929141-64-4. *The Principal's Kid.* Joan Weir. Polestar, 1999. 173 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-896095-98-4.

Mysteries are often thought of as marginal literature because they are often written according to a formula, in endless series, and with flat characters. Here are six mysteries that can be added to school reading lists because they will satisfy the literary expectations of adults and hook readers with their fast-moving plots. Curious, inquiring minds lead the characters of these three initial novels into exciting adventures. Faced with uncertainty, they become bolder and learn more about themselves as they become independent from the adults in their lives. These mysteries