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Arts in Mind

Open a Book About Art

By Suz Lipman

Summer can be a great time to explore both our artistic and our literary sides in ways we don't always make time for year-round. I recently asked Gwen Perin, a Park School art teacher, Yolanda Fletcher, the Mill Valley Public Library's Children's Librarian, and Anji Brenner, the Mill Valley City Librarian, for some suggestions for art-oriented summer reading. They came up with plenty of ideas, as well as some fun library programs.

Gwen Perin's suggestions for younger readers and artists include the following, all of which have an inspiring message about art and are uniquely and beautifully illustrated:

A Boy Named Giotto, by Paolo Guarneri, is about a real-life fresco artist in pre-Renaissance Italy.

Dem Bones, by Bob Barner, uses fun skeleton collages to bring life to the spirited song.

Dream Carver, by Diana Cohn, covers a young Oaxacan wood carver continuing a beautiful tradition while putting his own stamp on it.

Dragonology: The Complete Book of Dragons, by Earnest Drake, is an intricately compiled book, with fold-outs and antique maps, that reveals all about dragons and their habitats.

Picasso's One-Liners, by Pablo Picasso features whimsical drawings in a variety of media, by the master, who completed each drawing using one continuous line.

My Name is Georgia, by Jeanette Winter, is a biography, in picture-book form, that outlines the life and ideas of extraordinary painter Georgia O'Keefe.

Lastly, says Perin, get your hands on any "how-to-draw" book by Ed Emberley. They're fun and inspiring and they help artists of any age draw creatures and other figures using simple shapes.

Yolanda Fletcher listed the following picture books, all of which are available at the Mill Valley Public Library:

Art, by Patrick McDonnell, is about a very exuberant boy whose various creations are colorfully rendered and honored in such a way that would encourage others to make their own joyous art.

The Dot, by Peter H. Reynolds, contains a similar message about a young artist who doesn't think her work worthy until she is encouraged to "just make a mark", which leads her all to all kinds of creative experiments.

I Ain't Gonna Paint No More, by Karen Beaumont, is a playful, rhyming book about a boy who can't be kept from painting everything in sight.

Me and Uncle Romie, by Claire Hatfield, uses beautifully painted illustrations and a warm story to introduce readers to Harlem Renaissance collage artist Romare Beardon. Beardon's work also appears in the book.

Uncle Andy's, by James Warhola, is a very personal portrait of James' life with his famous, eccentric artist uncle Andy Warhol, who taught his nephew that "everything is art."

Frida, by Jonah Winter, is a colorful, folk-art-filled book about artist Frida Kahlo, who suffered from illnesses and accidents and continued to create art.

Through Georgia's Eyes, by Rachel Victoria Rodriguez, builds on the earlier "My Name is Georgia", to further illuminate the life and work of Georgia O'Keefe.

Museum Trip, by Barbara Lehman, is about a boy who gets lost inside various labyrinths in a museum.

You Can't Take a Balloon into the Metropolitan Museum, by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman, tells an adventure story of a balloon on the loose in New York with whimsical pen-and-ink drawings.

Behold the Bold Umbrellaphant, by Jack Prelutsky, combines great artwork and silly poems about whimsical part animal-part object creatures.

Morris the Artist, by Lore Segal, came especially highly recommended. Beautifully illustrated, it's about a boy who initially resists sharing his paints, only to end up getting many people to paint with him.

In children's fiction, Fletcher had these recommendations:

Chasing Vermeer, by Blue Balliet, follows a pair of art-obsessed 6th graders who try to solve a mystery involving a stolen Vermeer painting. The highly entertaining book contains additional puzzles and secret messages.

The Wright 3, also by Blue Balliet, speaks to the nature of architecture as art, as the pair from "Chasing Vermeer" band together to save a Frank Lloyd Wright house from destruction.

Pieces of Georgia, by Jen Bryant, is about a young teen who discovers art as a way of moving past the grief of losing her mother.

Fletcher's other suggestions for children include:

Chuck Close Up Close, by Jan Greenburg, is the inspiring story of artist Chuck Close, who overcame learning disabilities and then paralysis to become a rather unique and successful artist.

Masterpieces Up Close, by Claire D'Harcourt, is an interactive book that illuminates many wonderful details about some of the world's most famous paintings.

For adults, Anji Brenner offers the following suggestions:

The Rescue Artist: A True Story of Art, Thieves, and the Hunt for a Missing Masterpiece, by Edward Dolnick, recounts the theft of Edvard Munch's "The Scream" and the detectives who recovered it, with much insight into the art world.

Museum of the Missing: A History of Art Theft, by Simon Houpt, includes a comprehensive view of art heists and a gallery of missing art.

I Was Vermeer: The Rise and Fall of the Twentieth Century's Greatest Forger, by Frank Wynne, covers a "successful" Vermeer forger and his methods for fooling the art community.

The Mill Valley Library web site offers these additional suggestions for reading about art: http://www.supportlibrary.com/nl/users/millvalley/web/nl_14.html

Library Program: Paper, Plastic, or Picasso?

Fittingly, the theme of the library's summer reading program is "Paper, Plastic, or Picasso?" Hands-on programs will include creating decorative planets from found objects, collaborating on a giant Earth Thangka (painted scroll), a portrait workshop, a paper-making project, and an art party in the redwood grove behind the library. Visit the Mill Valley Library's Children's Room for more information.

"Arts in Mind" is a series from Kiddo! that explores arts and arts education. Suz Lipman is a writer and a parent in the Mill Valley School District.