
Sources

Professional Materials

Karen Antell, Editor

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Biographies to Read Aloud with Kids: From Alvin Ailey to Zishe the Strongman. By Robert Reid. Chicago: Huron Street Press, 2014. 135 p. Paper \$19.95 (ISBN: 978-1-9375-8957-8).

Biographies to Read Aloud with Kids is a guidebook to excellent biographies of important figures throughout history who are missing from traditional school textbooks. Reid has selected two hundred biographies that adults—parents, teachers, and librarians—can read aloud with children. He includes a wide range of complete biographies (covering a subject's entire life), partial biographies (covering an incident in a subject's life), collective biographies, and a few bilingual books as well. The choices are a good mixture of formats, too, including narratives, verse stories, and even graphic novels. Reid has chosen books with great writer's "flair," an even split of male and female subjects, and a diversity of subjects, but, perhaps most importantly, he has selected books that tell "a good story" (xiii-xiv). He also has avoided biographies of athletes, actors, and other pop culture figures because they would date the book's selections quickly. The biographies are presented in two chapters—the first on individual subjects and the second on collective biographies. Many of the selections include black and white photos of the cover or an image from the book. A few entries also include an additional "highly recommended" title or two. Three short chapters feature interviews with authors and a publisher of biographies for young readers.

The strength of this book is the wide choice of biographies. Reid has done a good job as well in avoiding trendy subjects, instead focusing on important world figures or interesting people from history. Well-known subjects include Louisa May Alcott, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Wright brothers. But lesser known people are also included: Mary Anning, a young girl who discovered the bones of the first ichthyosaur and inspired the rhyme, "She sells seashells by the seashore"; George Crum, a chef who created the potato chip when a customer complained about her potatoes being cut too thickly; Ruth Harkness, who continued her late husband's expedition to bring the first panda to America; and Clara Lemlich, who gave an inspiring speech that led to the Shirtwaist Makers' 1909 strike.

The book's largest weakness is that, contrary to promotional claims, the book is not divided into topics. Instead, the individual biographies are alphabetized by the subject's name; the book does not provide an easy way to locate biographies of, say, scientists, or musicians, or political leaders. Moreover, the book suggests some biographies that, although excellent as biographies, are not conducive to reading aloud with large groups of children, such as lengthy biographies and graphic novels.

Overall, this is a recommended book that will give adults many choices of entertaining and educational biographies of both well-known and relatively unknown individuals throughout history whose stories might interest and inspire children.—Lindsey Tomsu, *Teen Coordinator, La Vista Public Library, La Vista, Nebraska*