



A Child of Books

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This is what might be called, to recall an old American expression, a 'motherhood and apple pie' book. The sentiments that it expresses about the value of books to children and the power of the imagination are likely to be heartily endorsed by anyone in the children's book world. And it's certainly a cleverly conceived, ingeniously illustrated and beautifully designed and produced picture book. Passages of text from 'classic children's books' are used to form a landscape of adventure 'made from stories' - a sea of words, a mountain of make believe, a forest of fairy tales - in which a boy and a girl discover 'a home of invention where anyone at all can come.' A list of the many 'classic' books from which chunks of text are extracted forms the endpapers of the book. It's the kind of book that you and I might buy to give one another for Christmas and that would reflect well on both of us. Really it's a book for adults and, of course, a very special group of adults. The 'classics' (sorry, but I do need the quotation marks) that are chosen as the gateways to a child's imagination are mainly nineteenth century, and also include some, like **Moby Dick**, **Robinson Crusoe**, **The Three Musketeers**, **Great Expectations** and **Gulliver's Travels**, that were not written for children. There are many, too, that few children would read in the original but are more likely to know from abridgements or film adaptations. They are the kind of titles that might have still been recommended to bookish children in the middle of the last century but, with some exceptions like **The Secret Garden**, **Wind in the Willows** and the **Alice** titles, have long since disappeared from most children's shelves. The creators of the book claim that these were the books they enjoyed in their childhoods. If so, born in the late 1970s, they missed an awful lot of good stuff, including some outstanding picture books. But then, so it says on his website, Sam Winston has a history of 'data mining' 'classic nineteenth century children's literature to playfully reveal meta narratives and visual assumptions?'. And these are, I imagine, conveniently out of copyright This is a book that 'salutes the flag' but says little about many of the books that have fired children's imaginations in the last half century or that are likely to do so in the future.

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