

Book reviews

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How the Queen Found the Perfect Cup of Tea

By Kate Hosford, Illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska, Carolrhoda Books, 2017

This embracing story is about one arrogant, spoilt Queen who learns humility after returning from her journey around the world in search of the perfect cup of tea. Along the way, she meets delightful children who charm her with their invitations to share a delicious cup of tea with them. This bright and positive book celebrates the power of friendship; something that can occur, quite magically, when two strangers share “a cuppa” together.



Saga

By Nikki McWatters, University of Queensland Press, 2019

This historical novel revolves around the lives of three extraordinary young women, who lived during the Viking era, 19th Century Scotland and contemporary Australia.

Viking Astrid is destined to become a high priestess of the Sisterhood. To do this she must learn the art of being a skáldmær and recite Nordic legends and poems at the King’s court. Astrid also knows she must record her Sisterhood lore before it is lost. The Christian religion is ruthlessly determined to wipe out any pagan religion, particularly those that empower women.

Mercy November grows up in a poorhouse in early 19th century Glasgow, Scotland. When she is old enough, she is sent off to work for an undertaker where she literally uncovers “skull duggery” that forces her to make a rapid escape to London. There she is rescued by Gothic author Ann Radcliffe, who introduces her to her friends Percy and Mary Shelley. Finally, she seeks independence, first as a nanny to young Charles Dickens; and then as a teacher at a pauper’s Sunday School in Glasgow. When she returns to the poorhouse to retrieve her family heirloom Systir Saga, she uncovers the truth about her lost mother.

Mia Stewart, under tragic family circumstances, is given the ancient family book Systir Saga. Intrigued by its thousand-year-old history, Mia travels from the Blue Mountains to Scotland for advice. This leads her to the windswept Orkney Island where she risks her life searching for a second ancient Sisterhood heirloom that reveals the empowering connections women have with the natural world.

Teacher for Justice

By Heather Goodall, Helen Randerson and Devleena Ghosh, Australian National University Press, 2019

Federation founding member Lucy Woodcock (1889-1968) was an extraordinary campaigner for justice, peace and women’s rights. She was one of the last pupil-teachers before the introduction of teacher training colleges. Woodcock led the union as its Senior Vice President from 1934 to 1953. As well, she was the

president of the national body of teachers and was a strong voice calling for government investment in quality and progressive working-class education. Lucy was also elected the first woman graduate on the University of Sydney Senate in 1942.

Teaching at Eden, Cessnock, Grafton and Erskineville public schools inspired her to devote her life working for a better world. Teaching also motivated her to complete two Bachelor degrees, in Arts and Economics, at the University of Sydney. Lucy believed that teachers, and their work, were the foundation of a strong and democratic society. She knew that teachers, united as unionists, were formidable.

Lucy worked tirelessly to repeal the 1932 legislation that dismissed women teachers when they married. Despite her bitter disappointment with many male teachers who opposed equal pay, she pursued campaigns for equality with campaigners such as Jessie Street.

Lucy framed her politics through a transnational lens and was acutely aware of the destructive effects of colonialism and racism. She was outraged by governments spending millions on armaments that led to destruction and the impoverishment of children. She spent a lifetime campaigning for international peace and worked closely with Federation President Sam Lewis whom Federation honours with the annual Sam Lewis Peace Prize.

Janine Kitson is a Life Member

Celebrating Difference

By Shaun Dellenty, Bloomsbury Education, 2019

The self-professed goal of this book is to support schools in creating lasting cultural change for LGBTIQ inclusion. Through personal observations and anecdotes, along with more than 10 years of research, Dellenty looks to a future in which schools are increasingly focused on sincere wellbeing and dignity.

This book highlights a positive and open approach to facilitating meaningful change. This approach looks beyond “glossy teacher resources” and superficial “check-list” responses to bullying or exclusion, instead adopting a six-tier process.

He encourages staff to establish an authentic sense of school attitudes towards LGBTIQ identities, moving to the strategic development of a “robust ... vision for school improvement and a realignment of school ethos and vision”.

He notes that schools need a philosophy predicated upon ongoing training, global citizenship, compassionate relationships, and inclusive behaviour policies in order to truly build an environment inclusive for gender and sexually diverse students. These are the kind of structural goals that benefit all students. At times, the author explores the academia through narrative, making a challenging and intellectual topic more palatable. He includes practical discussion starters and activities that could be used in schools at meetings or classrooms.

Many of his descriptions of different personalities we may encounter in our staffing environment will feel very familiar to many of us, but Dellenty remains realistic and optimistic about how to bring about systemic change, engaging as many members of the school community as possible.

This book focuses on empowering young people. As Dellenty writes, our students “need immediate support, validation and representation” and this book is a valuable resource in aiding educators to provide just that.

Rebecca Langham is a member of the LGBTIQ Restricted Committee