
Children's Book Review

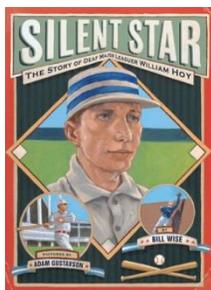
Marginalization and the Resiliency of the Human Spirit Captured in Two Distinct Biographies

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Introducing student readers to a variety of role models, especially people who are on the edge and outside of mainstream society, is a task that teachers should strive to accomplish. By including a variety of people in various situations through the stories shared in our classrooms and by deconstructing these texts, the narratives that make up our history become more inclusive and much richer. The following two picture books allow teachers to do just that while presenting to the reader resilient people who were not readily accepted or included into the folds of the society of their times.



Wise, Bill with Adam Gustavson (Illustrator) (2012). *Silent Star: The Story of Deaf Major Leaguer William Hoy*. New York: Lee and Low Books. 40 pp., ISBN: 978-1-60060-411-9 (hc), \$18.95 (Ages 6 & up).



In the 19th century, when William “Dummy” (a name he preferred and a name that was not perceived as derogatory during his time period) Hoy made baseball history by being the first player ever to throw out three runners at home plate in one game, the enthusiastic fans wildly waved their arms and hats and threw confetti in gratitude and appreciation. The crowd did this because Hoy could not hear their approving shouts and applauses as he was hearing impaired.

In *Silent Star*, award-winning author Bill Wise and award-winning illustrator Adam Gustavson acquaint the reader with William Hoy, a relatively unknown hero in baseball and in life. At age three, Hoy lost his hearing due to illness and, as a young boy, he was bewildered by the reactions of others as he routinely faced doubt, discrimination, and ignorance.

Some children teased William or were afraid to play with him because he was deaf and did not use his voice to communicate. Adults could be thoughtless too, looking down on the boy or ignoring him altogether. Friendly and personable, William was confused, his feelings hurt. Everyone was different in some way. He wondered why people could not accept him as he was.

However, Hoy was determined and did not shrink back; moreover, it was his good fortune to attend the Ohio School for the Deaf. There, as he learned how to use Sign Language and read lips, William thrived. He felt he “fit in.” It was also there where he played baseball as an outfielder, and he dared to dream of playing baseball in the big leagues—an unimaginable idea as there were no deaf players at that time playing an everyday fulltime position.

After his schooling, Hoy apprenticed as a shoemaker. It was not his first job choice; however, there were not many employment possibilities for people who were deaf. Even though Hoy would have preferred playing baseball, he remained a conscientious and meticulous worker. He also built a baseball field outside of his shop for the local teenagers. During the summer when business was slow, he would play ball also. It was while playing on that field that William was discovered by a coach—a life changing event for Hoy. After two seasons in the minor leagues, William was invited to try out for the major leagues. Against popular public opinion and belief, he secured a starting position with the Washington Nationals. Not only was Hoy able to break new ground by ignoring the negative judgments of others surrounding his difference, but he recognized the implication that he could be opening the door for other players who were deaf.

A harmonious complement to Wise’s prose is Gustavson’s oil paintings. These images are vividly detailed and real to life. Not only do the pictures offer the reader a glimpse of baseball history, but they evoke a sense of the ball playing and ballparks of that era. Equally important, the paintings perceptibly capture Hoy’s indomitable spirit.

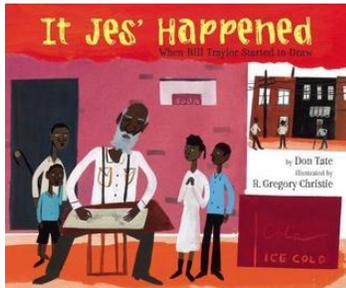
Silent Star is a book that can help open the door for male and female readers because of its captivating story. At a time when there was little sensitivity displayed toward people with differences and despite the many obstacles Hoy encountered, he was a courageous pioneer, whose determination, hard work, creativity, and passion allowed him to embrace his differences and to succeed in a hearing world. Hoy’s qualities and his example for living are things that educators can bring to life in the classroom.

Although Hoy has been inducted into several Halls of Fame (the American Association of the Deaf, the Ohio Baseball, and the Cincinnati Reds), Hoy has not been given full official recognition in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, even though a number of his peers (including Connie Mack, Clark Griffith, and Honus Wagner) feel he is worthy of such an honor. Educators could encourage students to research Hoy’s statistics and compare them to other Hall of Famers to determine whether he deserves to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Students could present arguments or write letters to share their points of view. In addition, *Silent Star* lends itself to discussing current day issues surrounding injustices about prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination

Let’s wave our hats and throw confetti for Wise and Gustavson for bringing William Dummy Hoy’s fascinating story to the page and introducing readers to a truly inspirational person worthy of our respect and acknowledgment.



Tate, Don with Christie, R. Gregory (Illustrator) (2012). *It Jes' Happened When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*. New York: Lee and Low Books. 32 pp., ISBN: 978-1600602603 (hc), \$17.95 (Ages 6 and up).



Immediately after reading *It Jes' Happened When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*, I Googled Bill Traylor for two reasons: first, I had never heard of him and wanted to know more about his mesmerizing life; and second, Tate and Christie's well crafted book moved me to want to see Bill Traylor's actual artwork. What immediately struck me was the accuracy with which Christie depicted and captured Bill Traylor's drawings. I learned in the Afterword that Traylor's work is considered to be "outsider art" – that is art created by untrained artists and

by people who are on the outside of the mainstream art world and conventional culture and society.

Bill Traylor's life journey began in slavery, where he was given his master's surname and forbidden to read and write. After Emancipation, Traylor labored as a sharecropper and raised his large family on a farm in rural Alabama. For 80 years, Bill was a keen observer and "saved up memories of these times deep inside." The following year, at 81, with his wife dead and all his children gone, he moved to Montgomery. This was a radical change because a rural life had not prepared Bill for life in the city. Bill gained employment in a shoe factory; however, severe arthritis ended his work there. He then sold pencils for the United States government, but that did not provide sufficient funds, and Bill became homeless. He slept on sidewalks and in alleyways and doorways, until eventually the owners of a funeral home permitted him to sleep among the coffins. Resting there, "Bill was overcome with loneliness. He missed his family, his farm, his animals." But Bill found solace in his "saved-up memories" and, sitting on the sidewalk atop a wooden crate, he began to draw from those memories as well as from the sights he saw on the streets of Montgomery.

In spite of never learning how to read or write, Bill, at the age of 85, was able to vividly recall and share memories of his life story through drawings made with pencils or colored pencils and recycled bags and cardboard boxes. Even Bill was surprised and unsure from where this hidden talent had sprung, noting, "It jes come to me." Tate's well written and well rounded account of Bill's remarkable resiliency depicts Bill as a keen, careful observer who could be humorous and both loquacious or quiet. In writing about Bill's artwork, Tate explains that "Bill's pictures danced with rhythm unlike any [other] drawings." The same could be said about Christie's illustrations, as they not only capture Bill's endearing and humble personality throughout his long life, but they are also remarkable in their precision to Traylor's drawings.

It Jes' Happened provides a historical snapshot of life in the South during slavery and Reconstruction, as well as of Bill Traylor's resiliency to living that life. The book lends itself to having students deconstruct some of the subtle messages that were looked upon as normal during that time period, such as slaves being given the last names of their slave master and the illegality of educating slaves. In addition, one of

the main tenets of culturally responsive teaching is centering students' lives into the curriculum. What better way to do that than by having students draw pictures from their own memories, like Bill Traylor, and then write about their pictures? Not only does that activity allow students to share about themselves, thus validating students' lives, but it also allows for teachers and students to get to know each other personally and helps to build classroom community.