

## Nonfiction Reviews

Frank Keating, paintings by Mike Wimmer (2006). "Theodore". Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers: New York, NY.

Wimmer's realistic and detailed paintings provide a striking background for Keating's biography of the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Using text presented on a painted background resembling a sheet of paper torn from a book, Keating carefully details Roosevelt's childhood, highlighting how his childhood illnesses led the president to a love of reading. Written as a first-person account of Teddy's life from birth, we learn about his interests, hobbies, and accomplishments throughout his childhood up until his becoming President. Arranged chronologically, the book shows how Roosevelt's love of learning and reading during his childhood led to his writing his own books later in life. Continuously building on itself, the story goes on to show how Teddy's love of travel and adventure led him to go westward and eventually join the Spanish-American War, for which he received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The text is filled with quotes from Roosevelt himself, each of which appropriately fits with the story being told and gives some insight into the President's character. Unfortunately, the flow of the story is broken up with the author's sudden fluctuations between seemingly unrelated statements: "When I was nine, I composed a *'Natural History on Insects,'* in which I described an assortment of ants, spiders, ladybugs, fireflies, beetles, and dragonflies. My mother and I were great friends." Additionally, because the text alternates elaborate and compound sentences with

those that are simple and abrupt, the narrative comes across as choppy, making it seem less like a story and more like a collection of trivia facts.

Wimmer's exquisite oil on canvas paintings are certainly a pleasure to view, especially the detailed brushstrokes which create realistic images of Teddy's life. However, these images are not always a clear reflection of the text, while some are literal representations of a statement. Opposite a page declaring his father as his hiking partner is an illustration of the young boy and father hiking. However, on a page describing his international adventures, none of which mention a camel, is a depiction of two men racing camels. The incongruity of some text and images make it seem as if there was less collaboration in some stages than others.

Overall, "Theodore" is a more serious approach to President Roosevelt's boyhood than the more playful "You're on Your Way, Teddy Roosevelt" by Judith St. George. With illustrations closer to caricature than portrait and a text that reads more like a narrative, St. George's book gives a detailed and humorous account as compared to Keating's dry, straightforward approach. Both books contain a brief post-childhood biography at the end, but only the St. George book offers a bibliography. Children are more likely to enjoy the St. George book because of its light-hearted approach, whereas the visual appeal of Wimmer's paintings will attract those more interested in the fine arts than the art of writing.

This book is best suited for children aged six to nine, as the more advanced reader is likely to be bored with the simpler sentences, and a younger child may not understand the more complex text. Public and school libraries looking to expand their collection of juvenile literature on President Roosevelt may want to consider this book strictly for its art work, which has the potential to attract new readers to the topic because of its eye catching visual appeal. However,

as a biography it is vague (simply alluding to his "illness" rather than specifying "asthma") and unimpressive; hardly an accurate portrayal of Teddy Roosevelt's greatness.

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James M. Deem (2005). "Bodies from the Ash: Life and Death in Ancient Pompeii". Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, MA.

"Bodies from the Ash" are brought to life in this vivid account of Pompeii's final days. Deem discusses the archeological evidence uncovered at the excavation sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and uses scientific reconstruction to give an accurate and engaging description of the eruption of Vesuvius and its effects on the nearby civilizations. Deem's detailed descriptions allow readers to be transported to Pompeii's past and present, giving the history of Pompeii as the site of tragedy, excavation, and tourism.

Deem does an excellent job of explaining difficult scientific processes and terms given in a way that is easy to understand. The book is appropriately indexed at a depth that is both useful and precise for readers looking for specific information rather than a comprehensive overview. Many works about Pompeii, such as Sheila Tanaka's "The Buried City of Pompeii" are filled with illustrations depicting the people of Pompeii as lively citizens. In contrast, "Bodies from the Ash" is filled with rare photographs of the plaster casts and artifacts found during excavations. Readers looking for a more upbeat and story-like approach may enjoy "The Buried City of Pompeii", but Deem's work takes a more informative approach with his interdisciplinary analysis of Pompeii.

The gruesome images of skeletons and plaster casts may be too shocking for children under 8, and the text will be too difficult for children below middle school to understand. Public and Middle School libraries will find this book a welcome addition to their collection.