

Reading Matters

Find What You Do Best: Celebrating Talent in Children's Books by Jean Dugan

On a beach somewhere in the world, a child is building a sandcastle. She's used buckets and shovels to build a strong foundation, shells and feathers for decoration, and now she's adding the turrets. She chooses fancy ones, delicate, lacy little drip castles that seem to rise out of the structure as she lets the gritty water drip from her fingertips, higher and higher until . . . oh, no, it crashes from underneath or from a wave that washes it completely away. And she begins all over again.



Jean Dugan, a long-time friend of *Exchange*, has been connecting kids with books for over 40 years. She helped establish a library program in the elementary schools of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and later brought her love of children's literature to the public library there. This is one more opportunity for her to share the best new books with children and those who care about them.

But what if she could keep building? What if the castle could be designed in such a way that it could outlast the tides? Could it become big enough to hide in? As big as a house? How about a cathedral? This is the concept on which Christy Hale has based her book **Dreaming Up: a**

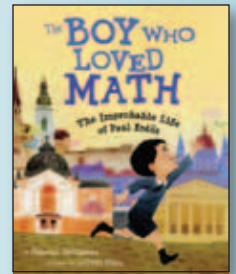


Celebration of Building by Christy Hale (Lee and Low Books, 2012) Ages 4-8, one of the coolest books I've seen in a long time. Take a building block, add another, imagine some water and trees — could this be how Frank Lloyd Wright conceived Fallingwater in Pennsylvania? Did Antonin Gaudi start with a drip castle and end up designing Basilica Sagrada Familia in Barcelona? Think of Habitat in Montreal as big Legos®, creatively arranged. The left side of each double page spread in **Dreaming Up** features kids playing with ordinary building toys and found objects — blocks, pillows, paper tubes, sticks — and a short, descriptive shape poem. On the right is a photo of an example of innovative architecture — some well known, some less famous — that uses the same building concept that the children are exploring. Who knows what amazing things we can discover, about the world and ourselves, if we find the thing we do best, and follow where it leads?

But what if we don't yet know what it is that we do best? Penguin, in **Penguin's Hidden Talent** by Alex Latimer (Peachtree, 2012) Ages 3-6, can't figure out what his talent is. He can't burp the alphabet like Fox, he can't juggle appliances like Bear, but what he discovers he can do is organize a fantastic talent show that his friends can't beat. We're all good at something, no matter how obscure, and sometimes we need to be reminded of that.



Paul Erdos knew what he was good at from a very early age: numbers. I learned a great deal from **The Boy Who Loved Math: the Improbable Life of Paul Erdos** by Deborah Heiligman, illustrated by LeUyen Pham (Roaring Brook Press, 2013) Ages 6-10, which details his consuming passion for numbers, especially prime numbers, and his willingness to share with everyone he met.



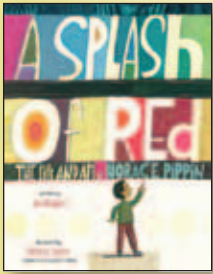
"I discovered how much I loved art the summer I spent with my grandmother and father in Michigan . . ." Patricia Polacco's picture books are often autobiographical and none more so than **The Art of Miss Chew** (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2012) Ages 5-10. Young Patricia's learning disabilities keep her from academic success; but a beloved mentor, equally passionate about art, finds a way for her talents to shine.



Artists seem to have extra reserves of passion, and often must work tirelessly, sometimes against the most difficult of odds, to bring their talent to shine on the world. Here are several picture book biographies for kids in the early grades:



Georgia O'Keeffe, hired by the Hawaiian Pineapple Company to promote pineapple juice, found her passion not in the fruit but, as we know, in the flowers of the islands. **Georgia In Hawaii: When Georgia O'Keeffe Painted What She Pleas'd** by Amy Novesky, illustrated by Yuyi Morales (Harcourt Children's Books, 2012) Ages 5-8.



Horace Pippin loved to draw until his right arm was seriously injured in World War I. He lived quietly in a suburb of Philadelphia,

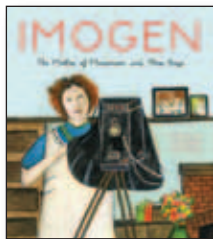
until his passion for art gave him the strength to learn all over again, with left-over house paint found in an alley. Jen Bryant tells the story of his happy success in **A Splash of Red: the Life and Art of Horace Pippin**, illustrated by Melissa Sweet (Alfred A. Knopf, 2013) Ages 5-8.

“One hand in the dishpan, the other in the darkroom,” Imogen

Cunningham’s life blended her talent

for photography and her passion for her family, and vice versa, as told in

Imogen: the Mother of Modernism and Three Boys by Amy Novesky, illustrated by Lisa Congdon (Cameron and Company, 2012) Ages 5-8.



Dreams of a colorful life sustained Henri Matisse through years of ill health and



poverty until his last years when he created the bright collages that are among his most enduring masterpieces.

Colorful Dreamer: the Story of Artist Henri Matisse by Marjorie Blain Parker, illustrated by Holly Berry (Dial Books for Young Readers, 2012) Ages 5-8, tells his story in black and white, and of course, lots of color.