



One Book, One Community

Debbie Blank

— “If you are a dreamer, come in,” suggests Shel Silverstein in the first sentence of his 130-poem anthology “Where the Sidewalk Ends.”

It is the second book Batesville Memorial Public Library trustees have chosen for the area One Book, One Community program.

Avid readers submitted their recommendations. “We read through 10 to a dozen nominations,” reports trustee Lisa Barnett. “It became obvious to us we all wanted to do ‘Where the Sidewalk Ends’ ... We all thought ‘Oh, what a great book!’ It’s a classic – fun for adults and ‘Let’s do something for kids, too.’”

According to trustee Chris Fairchild, “We wanted to do something a little different.” She points out the book can foster families reading together, “something that in America is sometimes lost.” Fairchild observes many parents “stop reading (aloud to their youngsters) when children start. That’s a big mistake.” She says studies have shown children who have been read to later in their development do better in school.

Since its 1974 publication, more than 4.5 million copies have been sold, making the tome full of silly words and pen-and-ink drawings the bestselling children’s poetry book ever, according to the amazon.com Web site. Barnett, a Batesville Middle School teacher, admires the poet’s topics and details. “In our seventh-grade literature book, we have ‘Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout would not take the garbage out.’ I think it’s just fun stuff ... You can just picture all of that food ... and his rhyming. It’s light-hearted. It’s about being a kid.” But older folks will enjoy the book as well. “There are some messages.”

Of the anthology, Fairchild says her granddaughter, 7, “is just heartbroken if we don’t read some poems every night,” especially “The Unicorn,” which is recited daily. “They’re really wacky. They’re a little quirky sometimes, but she loves them. She’ll just laugh at them. That’s why it has been so popular.”

Right now there is a high demand by the public and publishers for poetry, especially written for kids, says Fairchild, who owns The Bookshelf. “We’re finding more books in rhyme and cadence than ever before.” She adds, “We sell this every Christmas to a whole new generation of readers and listeners.”

Jim Trelease, author of “The New Read-Aloud Handbook,” calls “Where the Sidewalk Ends” “without question, the best-loved collection of poetry for children.”

Silverstein, a Chicago native, was 67 when he died in 1999. He wasn’t just a writer, but also a cartoonist, composer and folksinger, Barnett says. Silverstein wrote the former hit songs “A Boy Named Sue” and “The Cover of the Rollin’ Stone” and was nominated for an Academy Award in Music for the song “I’m Checkin’ Out” from the movie “Postcards from the Edge,” according to the Internet School Library Media Center Web site.

For persons who want to take part in One Book, One Community, copies of the book are available for checkout at the library or can be purchased at The Bookshelf.

Readers who already have copies may want to share them.

Participants should read “Where the Sidewalk Ends” over the holidays. “In January we plan to offer activities for the community,” Barnett says. Those might include a guest speaker to lead a poetry workshop or perhaps readings by high school drama students or community members as an event for younger tykes. Details will appear in upcoming issues of The Herald-Tribune.

The first book in BMPL’s One Book, One Community was the New York Times best seller “Ten Things I Learned from Bill Porter: The Inspiring True Story of a Door-to-Door Salesman Who Changed Lives” by Shelly Brady. It was celebrated in early 2006.

The next book after “Where the Sidewalk Ends” is “The Secret Life of Bees” by Sue Monk Kidd. The novel that Publishers Weekly describes as having “a hive's worth of appealing female characters, an offbeat plot and a lovely style” will be studied in February or March, according to Barnett.

“These were all community nominations,” she notes. Readers are invited to suggest future books for the program by using forms available at the library.

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