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Summer Birds: The Butterflies Of Maria Merian



Synopsis

In the Middle Ages, people believed that insects were evil, born from mud in a process called spontaneous generation. Maria Merian was only a child, but she disagreed. She watched carefully as caterpillars spun themselves cocoons, which opened to reveal summer birds, or butterflies and moths. Maria studied the whole life cycle of the summer birds, and documented what she learned in vibrant paintings. This is the story of one young girl who took the time to observe and learn, and in so doing disproved a theory that went all the way back to ancient Greece.

Book Information

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Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

Customer Reviews

Grade 1-4 In the Middle Ages, insects were thought to be evil, and to generate spontaneously in the mud. Born in the 1600s, 13-year-old Maria Merian had a passion for butterflies (and other insects), and she describes her study of their habits and their life cycle in this first-person narrative. Her activities are suspect and punishable. Fortunately, her artistic family provides her the training and time to study, collect, and paint insects and their habitats. Maria alludes to her adult life as she dreams of a future publishing a book and traveling the world. The flowing vines, jewel tones, and imaginary creatures in the illustrations all evoke artwork from the time. Occasional black backgrounds provide backdrops for her imagination. As an adult, Merian's groundbreaking work caught Carl Linnaeus's attention, and copies of her published prints are now housed in art museums around the world. A historical note shares some of the context of her life. Although a little

slight on content, this fascinating glimpse of a woman far ahead of her time and unknown to most young readers offers a fresh perspective on the study of insects. Carol S. Surges, McKinley Elementary School, Wauwatosa, WI Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review Engle, who has set many of her award-winning titles in Cuba, turns her attention to seventeenth-century Germany in this luminous picture-book biography of a girl who disproved centuries of scientific belief through simple observation. Born in Frankfurt in 1647, Maria Sibylla Merian disagreed with the conventional wisdom, dating back to the Greeks, that “summer birds, or butterflies, were “beasts of the devil” that sprang alive from the mud through spontaneous generation. Engle writes in the voice of Maria as a young teen, who carefully watches the slow transformation of caterpillars to winged adults, painting everything that she sees, always in secret: “Neighbors would accuse me of witchcraft if they knew.” In expertly pared-down language, the poetic lines deftly fold in basic science concepts about life cycles, along with biographical details that are further developed in an appended historical note. Paschke’s brilliantly colored and patterned paintings are an exuberant counterpoint to the minimal words. Swirling with vibrantly colored creatures, the spreads include whimsical references to popular superstitions of the time: in one wild, subterranean image, for example, a dragonlike beast lurks in the mud and spews butterflies from its jaws. Joyous and inspiring, this beautiful introduction to a passionate young scientist who defied grown-ups and changed history will spark children’s own fascination with the natural world and its everyday dramas. Grades K-3.

--Gillian Engberg

I discovered Maria Merian when looking for women botanists to share with my students. I was shocked to find out that Maria Merian was an amazing artist and scientist with a great story. This book captivated my students. Well written and illustrated.

I am sending this to our Granddaughters in July. I fell in love with it and shared it with friends. The illustrations are just beautiful and the story of a brave young girl who did her research and discovered how the butterflies perpetuate is a wonderful example for young girls. Our Granddaughters are 5 and 8. One wants to be scientist so I am sure she will identify with the story. I loved the name Summer Birds for butterflies. I also learned interesting facts from this book.

I use this to teach insect metamorphosis in grades 3-5. It's a true story, and shows the value of critical thinking, making observations and inferences, and creating notebook entries. The illustrations are incredible.

Really beautiful illustrations in a book about science, and a female scientist, but written in a fun and entertaining way. My girls love it!

Lovely book to inspire curiosity in a child. Thanks!

Love the illustrations and story. 5 year old enjoys this one.

SUMMER BIRDS was nominated for the 2011 Rodda Book Award sponsored by the Church and Synagogue Library Association (CSLA), an international organization serving congregational libraries of all faiths. CSLA's Rodda Award is named for Dorothy Rodda Sargent, a lifetime member and one of the founders of the organization. This award recognizes a book which exhibits excellence in writing and has contributed significantly to congregational libraries through promotion of spiritual growth. The award is given to books for adults, young adults, and children on a three-year-rotational basis. The 2011 Rodda Award focuses on books for children and this year's award will be presented at the CSLA annual conference to be held at the Hilton Embassy Row Hotel in Washington, D.C., July 19-22. To learn more about CSLA and the Rodda Award go to [...].

Purchased as a Christmas gift. The recipients loved it.

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