

Read Aloud Ideas

by Marty Layne
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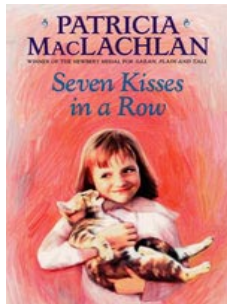
June 2008

It's June! For some reason, April and May just flew by. April was tax month and May was gardening. Now that June is here, I am able to squeeze in some time to write about books. I've been doing some thinking about the influences that shaped my thinking and who I am. (My 60th birthday is this month, which leads me to do some reflection.)

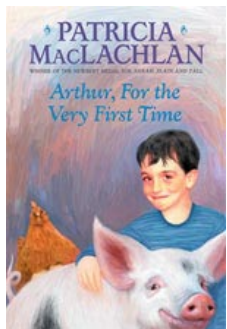
I can still remember my childhood enjoyment of the Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I'm sure they led me into trying life as a self-sufficient farmer in Cape Breton in the 1970's. Mystery stories about Trixie Belden inspired me to try my hand at writing – a two act play involving a villain known as Pete Moss who worked at a nursery – for a Girl Scout production when I was 11 years old. And the book *Ride Like An Indian* made me long to have a horse to ride. That wish was fulfilled on that self-sufficient farm in Cape Breton - a sweet Clydesdale/Belgian cross mare that I trained to pull a plow, a cart, and a sled.

Some of the books I mention in this issue of Read Aloud Ideas are ones I have for sale to those of you who live in Canada only because shipping books to the US is so expensive. They are listed at the end of this newsletter.

I've been rereading two children's authors - Patricia MacLachlan and E.B. White. Their writing inspires me. I'll start with Patricia MacLachlan. She's written a number of chapter books that make delightful read alouds for children as young as 4 up through 12 years old. Here's a list of my favourites:



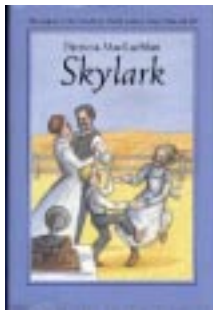
Seven Kisses In a Row - Emma and Zach help their aunt and uncle learn how to be good parents while their own parents are away at an "eyeball conference" for a week. The children also learn that while their own parents may do things in a certain way there are many ways to express love and care. A warm and delightful family story.



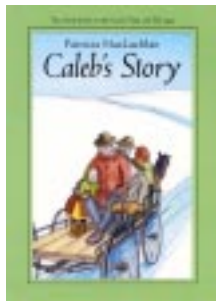
Arthur, For the Very First Time Arthur (10 years old) goes to spend time in the summer with his great aunt and great uncle on their farm in the country. He's used to writing in his journal daily because his parents don't seem to listen to him. His life takes a turn at the farm and he finds himself wondering about many things both wonderful and terrible as he realizes that life isn't quite what he thought it was. Another warm family story.



Sarah, Plain and Tall is the first of a series of five books about Sarah and her family. Each story is told from the point of view of a 9-10 year old child in the family passing from one sibling to the other. Sarah is a mail-order bride. Jacob Witting in the prairies offers her a home and marriage and the opportunity to be a mother to his two children, Anna and Caleb. The story is consistently child oriented throughout. It's a warm and delightful story about love and commitment and loss and fear.



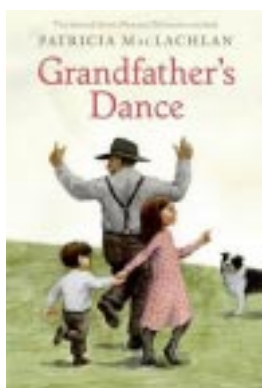
Skylark follows the story started in *Sarah Plain and Tall* but can be read on its own. The prairie summer is hot and dry and many farmers are leaving their farms. Sarah, pregnant, returns to Maine with Anna and Caleb during the drought. The children worry that Sarah will not want to return because she loves Maine and her aunts so much. After the rain starts to fall in the prairies, Jacob comes to bring the family back much to the children's and Sarah's relief.



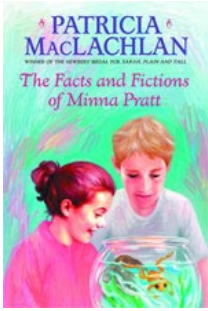
Caleb's Story – Anna passes the family journal on to Caleb to keep. Caleb keeps the journal in his own way. He discovers the secret of the old man his half sister Cassie has found in the barn. He helps to solve a family rift between his father and his father's father (Caleb's grandfather) – the old man found in the barn.



More Perfect Than the Moon – Cassie now takes over the journal keeping. The others in the family talk about her “imaginings,” but she says she writes the truths as she sees it. In this book, Cassie is worried that her mother (Sarah) will love the new baby she's expecting so much that she, Cassie, will be left out. It's a lovely record of a child coming to grips with the expansive nature of familial love.



Grandfather's Dance – Cassie continues the family journal and writes about marriage and her own dream groom – a dog - as the family prepares for the marriage of her older sister Anna. It's clear from her writing that she loves her new sibling – Jack, who is now 6 years old. She writes about the relationship she sees between Jack and Grandfather who are so much like each other. Grandfather is ill and dies before the end of the book. He is missed and at the same

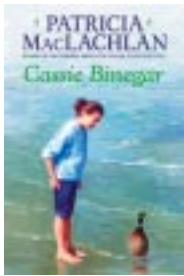


time his death is accepted as part of the circle of life.

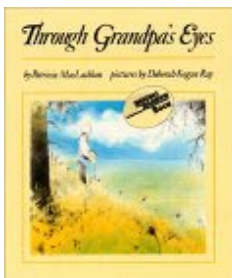
The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt From the Book:

“Next to Minna, leaning against the seat, is her cello in its zippered canvas case. Next to her cello is her younger brother, McGrew, who is humming. McGrew always hums. Sometimes he hums sentences, though most often it comes out like singing. McGrew’s teachers do not enjoy McGrew answering questions in hums or song. Neither does the school principal, Mr. Ripley. McGrew spends lots of time sitting on the bench outside Mr. Ripley’s office, humming.

Minna smiles at her brother. He is small and stocky and compact like a suitcase. Minna loves him. McGrew always tells the truth, even when he shouldn’t. He is kind. And he lends Minna money from the coffee jar he keeps beneath his mattress.”



Cassie Binegar (rhymes with vinegar) About change, death and the difficulties of growing up when things around one – family, friends - don’t stay the same. A warm and touching book dealing with a difficult situation.



Through Grandpa’s Eyes is in picture book format. Grandpa is blind – his grandson, John, wonders how his grandpa does all of the things he does. A lovely story about the closeness of their relationship and how someone who is blind relies on other senses to maneuver in the world.

The second author for great summer read alouds is E.B. White. *Charlotte’s Web* was recently made into a new movie. If you’ve not read the book to your children, please do. E. B. White’s writing is so wonderful. A movie just can’t capture his way with words. I’ve loved the story since I first read it when I was 10 years old. I read it to my children in various groupings at least three times and always found something new to enjoy. We have a recording of E. B. White reading *Charlotte’s Web*. I love hearing his voice! Here’s a link to a [letter](#) E. B. White wrote to children in answer to some of their questions about his books that you and your children might enjoy.

The Trumpet of the Swan by E. B. White is a wonderful story about a mute trumpeter swan named Louie and a boy named Sam. The story follows Louie as he deals with his lack of voice. Louie learns to play the trumpet his father steals for him. Louie becomes a musician and plays his trumpet in various places to earn money to pay back the music store for the stolen trumpet. The story follows Louie in his career as a musician and his and Sam’s life. When Sam is about 20 years old, he is again camping in Canada (Red Rock Lakes) and hears Louis playing taps to his children. Sam writes in his journal: *Tonight I heard Louis’s horn. My father heard it, too. The wind was right, and I could hear the notes of taps, just as darkness fell. There is nothing in all the world I like better than the trumpet of the swan.*

As I mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, I have some of these books for sale through [The Children's Book Fair](#). These are new books that have been remaindered - that's why the low price. Shipping costs will be added to the price. If you're interested in purchasing any of the books, email me with your postal or zip code and I can quote you an exact shipping cost.

The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt (paperback) \$3.50

Cassie Binigar (paperback) \$3.50

Skylark (paperback) \$3.00

Caleb's Story (paperback) \$3.00

More Perfect Than the Moon (hardcover) \$8.00

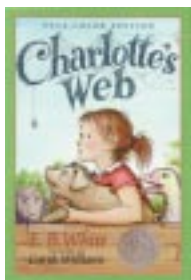
Grandfather's Dance (hardcover) \$8.00



Charlotte's Web (hardcover) \$8.00
Cover has a photo from the new movie and inside black and white illustrations are by Garth Williams



Trumpet of the Swan
(paperback) \$3.50



Charlotte's Web (paperback) \$5.00
Original interior black and white illustrations by Garth Williams
Watercolors of Garth Williams' art work by Rosemary Wells

I've added a donation button in my email for those of you who would like to make a financial investment in my writing. You can do this through PayPal which offers secure payments online. A suggested donation of \$1.00 would be much appreciated.

Feedback and comments are always welcome. Happy Reading!

All the best,
Marty

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