

## Literary Science: Books that Inspire Youthful Creativity and Curiosity

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This issue of *First Opinions, Second Reactions* was inspired by the very context in which we work—Purdue University. As many know, Purdue is praised for its science, agriculture, and engineering programs. Many famous individuals have graduated from these programs, including Neil Armstrong, first person on the moon, Gebisa Ejeta, winner of the 2009 World Food Prize, and Ei-ichi Negishi, winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Given this record of success, we decided to theme this issue on children’s books about science, specifically books that approach science topics from a literary or narrative perspective. We also planned to focus on Purdue faculty, staff, and alums as potential reviewers. In other words, for our last issue of the 2010-2011 school year, we opted to stay close to home and review books for young people that could inspire them to love science and intellectual exploration.

*Energy Island: How One Community Harnessed the Wind and Changed Their World*, by Allan Drummond, tells the true story of how a small community chose to use the power of wind to become energy independent. The renewable energy provided by wind turbines is a timely topic at Purdue University. The Energy Center at Purdue’s Discovery Park focuses part of its work on developing renewable energy technologies, such as wind power. There are also plans for Purdue to develop a commercial wind farm, “Purdue Energy Park,” with 60 turbines by December 2012.

*Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science*, by Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos, is a historically accurate nonfiction account of how sugar has affected numerous cultures and thousands of individual lives. The idea that one type of food, in this case sugar, might have helped create the Atlantic slave trade, might be a new revelation for many middle and high school readers who simply see sugar as a sweet treat. Connections between agriculture, history, and culture are keenly explored in this book, which also contains many provocative photos and images. There is even a supplementary video program of the authors talking about their book online at <http://www.booktv.org/Watch/12151/Sugar+Changed+the+World+A+Story+of+Magic+Spice+Slavery+Freedom+and+Science.aspx>.

*Case Closed? Nine Mysteries Unlocked by Modern Science*, by Susan Hughes and Michael Wandelmaier, is a little different than the previous two texts. In this rather lengthy picture book, the author and illustrator raise provocative questions about unsolved mysteries ranging from the missing Romanov family to what happened to George Mallory, the first person to attempt to scale Everest. In CSI fashion, the book explores how modern science

might help us find answers to many of these mysteries.

*Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night*, by Joyce Sidman and Rick Allen, takes a different approach to science—a poetic one. Sidman’s poems in this beautifully illustrated book are about the night activity of eleven animals, including owls, snails, moths, and spiders. Throughout the book, sidebar explanations of the animals provide scientific facts to accompany the poetic images. There is a YouTube video dramatization of the book which might be interesting to show to a young class: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEwQsuHOG4g>.

Last, we review *How I Became a Scientist: Activity Book for 3rd Graders*, written by three Purdue scientists in the School of Veterinary Medicine, Jessica Schneider, Kauline Davis, and Thad Blossom. This small book tells the story of eight scientists from all over the world who work with animals. The book is full of activities, puzzles, and games for the young readers. It is available as a free PDF download at <http://www.purdue.edu/svmengaged/sepa/activitybook3>. Also available on the website is a full alignment of the book with 3rd grade Indiana standards in English, math, social studies, and geography.

We hope you enjoy the “first opinions” of and “second reactions” to the five texts in this issue and choose to share many or all of them with the young people in your lives. Even though school will soon be dismissed for summer, it is important for young people to continue reading independently, and these books might be the perfect choice to motivate those who prefer to read about real-life inventions, innovations, and scientific methods. Who knows? These five texts might even inspire some future scientists at Purdue University!