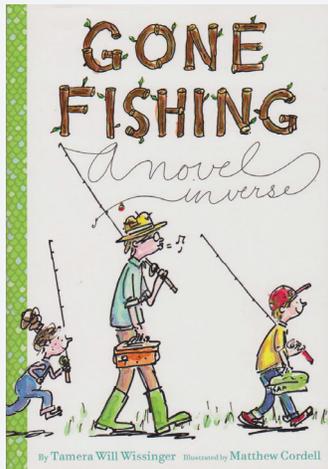


**First Opinion/Second Reaction, Combined Effort:
*Gone Fishing: An Eclectic Collection of Poetic Forms Tell a Story***

Wissinger, Tamera Will. *Gone Fishing*. Illus. Matthew Cordell.
New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

Christy Wessel Powell



Gone Fishing is a funny, short-but-substantial-looking novel (an important “look” for books in middle elementary), written all in verse. It is illustrated with funny cartoon line drawings reminiscent of Quentin Blake’s whimsical sketches in Roald Dahl novels. When I first read the book, I was struck by how easily I could skim through the pages and how effortlessly the format—everything in verse—flowed. This all bodes well for a read aloud. Plus, it was hilarious, and truly reminiscent of going on a dress-in-the-dark morning fishing trip (I’ve been on many).

It’s about a little boy, Sam, who can’t wait to go fishing with his dad but is joined on the trip by his annoying little sister, Lucy. Trouble seems to be brewing when the boy, Sam, packs his tackle box for the trip (in Switcheroo Poem form, of course):

I love my fishing tackle box—it’s green and blue and gold.
My grandpa gave it to me when I wasn’t very old.

I need to get it ready for tomorrow at the lake.
We’re leaving in the morning just as soon as we’re awake...

...The shelf is on a hinge—it hides my secret space below.
It's where I keep my special treasures out of sight—
OH NO! (5)

Where's my compass?
Where's my map?
Where's my lucky fishing cap?

Where's my stringer?
Something's wrong!
This *princess doll* does not belong!(6)

Yes, Sam realizes Lucy has been poking around his fishing gear, and what's worse, she ends up being invited to come on the fishing trip by dad! Sigh. Sam 'curses' Lucy with a Curse Poem of Address, but to no avail:

May a worm crawl up your nose,
Leeches creep between your toes...

May you grow a knee-length beard
So your friends all think you're weird... (13)

Lucy's invited anyway (in a Dramatic Poem for Three Voices):

Dad: ...The boat's no place to stomp or thump.
Lucy: I won't dance, I won't squirm. I'll be as quiet as a worm.
Dad: Ok, then, now it's just us three.
Sam: But, Dad, it was just you and me... (20)

Despite Sam's protests, Lucy comes along. At the lake, Lucy clanks around and makes too much noise in the boat (in Sam's opinion), and, even more annoyingly, she catches the *most* fish. In her words (in Triolet form):

Catching fish is such a blast!
It's easy and I'm really good.
Hooked one on my second cast.
Catching fish is such a blast!
Maybe I'll beat Sam—at last.
I wonder if he thinks I could.

Catching fish is such a blast!
It's easy and I'm really good. (55)

Lucy continues to annoy with her Ode to a Worm and her multiple catches. But when Sam snags the biggest fish all day and Lucy immediately cheers, Sam realizes he may have been wrong about bemoaning bringing her (in Free Verse):

"You caught one, Sam!"
Lucy scoots close to me.
"A big one, too!"

I nod, gulp.

I didn't even *look*
when she caught
her first fish.

But she
cheered for me.

Maybe I was wrong
about bringing her along. (57)

Once home, Sam realizes he's been too hard on Lucy and decides to forgive her in the Cinquain, "Amends":

Lucy
shows everyone
how I caught my catfish.
My heart hip-hops when she calls me
"hero." (87)

With only one semi-regretful reprise from dad (in Limerick form), the story ends well:

Once a dad took his daughter and son
to catch fish—and they did—what a run!
The daughter caught eight fish.
The son fought two great fish.
So next time, could Dad catch just one? (90)

The book ends with The Poet's Tackle Box (i.e. a glossary), which accessibly uses examples from the book to explain what otherwise might be tricky or dry, out of context. For example:

APOSTROPHE

Talking directly to a subject that can't respond is apostrophe. In "Gone Fishing," Sam says, "Hello there, moon, I'm fishing soon." (108)

SWITCHEROO POEM

A switcheroo poem is a sudden change. A switcheroo poem begins with an interesting topic, then, because of a surprise such as the one in "My Tackle Box," switches to a new topic. (105)

And so on.

All in all, *Gone Fishing* has alluring classroom applications and is a practical choice for reluctant or boy readers that are harder to hook.

Because I wanted to know how the undergraduate student teachers in my children's literature course would react to this unique book, I shared it with them to determine how they felt about or connected with *Gone Fishing*. How could it be used with kids? What follows are their reactions.

Discussion with Student Teachers

Student teachers who reviewed this book agreed that *Gone Fishing* is *not* boring or inaccessible, a major compliment coming from this practical-minded group. They thought this book would work as a read aloud for nearly any grade level K–6, with the most enthusiastic audiences probably settling in around 2nd–4th grade. Something important for grades 2–4, they noted, was that this book looks like a fairly long novel, even though the actual word count is quite low given the amount of page space devoted to illustration. For children interested in transitioning to chapter book territory during independent reading, this format can be especially appealing.

The uncommon thing about *Gone Fishing* is that it is written using multiple types of poetry forms (all labeled in the book) without seeming forced: limericks, double dactyls, riddle poems, cinquains, free verse, shape poems, and more. So, the student teachers decided that reading a few pages aloud to the class each day would be a great way to integrate exposure to a variety of poetry types without rigidly marching children through the dreaded 'poetry unit' which many student teachers had unpleasant memories of from their own school experiences.

One student, Erica, reported, "First impressions—loved it! The words create pictures or are spaced in interesting ways." Reflecting on the format, Savana, said, "We like that it was done in a way that each poem is a specific person's perspective, like dialogue." Thinking more about how the book could expand language arts concepts, Tori suggested, "We could read it, and the class could make their own poems to expand the story" while Bonnie noted the

value in multiple voices, “I like that this book is broken up into different characters’ points of view. Students can read either from Sam’s point of view, Lucy’s point of view, or Dad’s point of view. All together, they look like a great set of individual stories connecting together so that all characters’ points of view are known, which is different than most stories.”

Still other students valued *Gone Fishing* for its potential to engage children and its utility as a possible classroom management tool. As Haley puts it, “This story is very funny and a great story I think some kids can really relate to...this would be a good book to use in the classroom for a short read aloud or even a brain break for kids.” And according to Jessica, “It’d be easy to use when you just need to fill a few minutes because you could just read a few of the pages.”

These beginning teachers gave *Gone Fishing* the ultimate endorsement: they would read it to children if given the chance.

About the Authors

Christy Wessel Powell is a PhD student and undergraduate instructor in the Department of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at Indiana University’s School of Education. Prior to coming to IU, she began her teaching career through the Teach for America program where she taught K–2.

The undergraduate student teacher contributors (**Savana Frank, Tori Babcock, Bonnie Wedle, Haley Trump, Jessica Hancock, and Erica Knicley**) are elementary education majors at Indiana University’s School of Education. They are currently enrolled in X460: Books for Reading Instruction/Trade Books in Elementary Classrooms. They are completing a field placement this semester in Martinsville, IN.