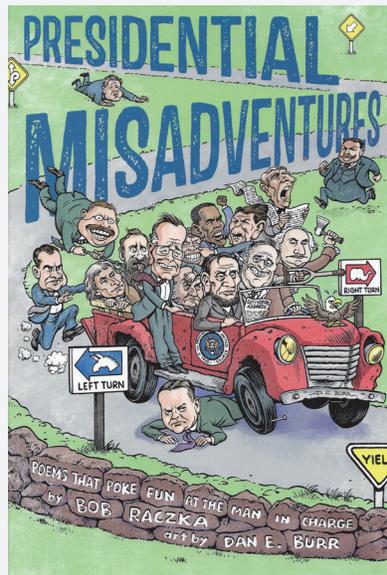


First Opinion: Political Clerihews: A Review of *Presidential Misadventures*

Raczka, Bob. *Presidential Misadventures: Poems That Poke Fun at the Man in Charge*. Illus. Dan E. Burr. New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2015. Print.

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Bob Raczka's *Presidential Misadventures* is a charming book of poems crafted to introduce the presidents of the United States to young readers. The simple poems are an interesting mixture of presidential fact and lore. Whether it is a simple yarn of Franklin Pierce's vanity or the fact of Warren Harding's size 14 shoes, the poems provide an interesting entrance into the lives of the most powerful men in the world.

The author, Bob Raczka, is the creative mind behind the Bob Raczka's Art Adventures series. The nonfiction series currently sits at 14 books designed to help young readers learn about famous artists and genres of art. The latest in the series, *Before They Were Famous: How Seven Artists Got Their Start*, is a Junior Library Guild selection. His current focus is upon writing children's poetry, of which the current book is a great example. Additionally, current books by Raczka focus on combining the words of poetry with fantastic imagery. These collections of poetry seem to focus on poems for young boys. Notable among these is *Guyku: A Year of Haiku for Boys*.

What made the poems in *Presidential Misadventures* come to life were the fantastic illustrations by Dan E. Burr. Burr's previous work, *Kings in Disguise*, is an amazing graphic novel

that has won Eisner and Harvey awards and has been included on several “Ten Graphic Novels Everyone Should Read” lists. Additionally, Burr has illustrated *Economix: How our Economy Works (And Doesn’t Work) in Words and Pictures* and a sequel to *Kings in Disguise* entitled *On the Ropes*. The caricatures Burr includes in *Presidential Misadventures* match the poems beautifully and bring the figures to life.

These simple poems are extremely straightforward and do not necessarily provide a large amount of insight into the office of the president, but they do provide a human view of those who have held the office, thus providing new insights about our presidents for a young audience. The poetry is at an intermediate reading level, giving youngsters who are just learning about the presidents an interesting glance into their lives. With this in mind, those who are reading about the presidents for the first time will be able to tackle the text and be successful readers, which should cultivate interest in the presidents. However, the stories within the poems contain broader information and thus hold great promise for older students as well.

The poem addressing Ronald Reagan shows the president sitting upon a pile of jellybeans, casually tossing one into a gaping jaw. Bill Clinton is drawn in a jogging suit, running from a fast-food restaurant while he devours a hamburger. George W. Bush is drawn in full golf regalia with the poem recounting his “900 days of vacation” (38). With this in mind, it is important to recall that the subtitle of the book indicates that the poems inside will be poking fun at those who have held the office of the president. There is no political venom meant in the poems; they are simply short depictions of the “human side” of past presidents and their administrations. A clever teacher of history or civics will be able to use these poems at the middle or even secondary level to introduce these clerihew poems about presidential figures as anticipatory sets, or in interesting projects focused on the presidents.

Burr’s illustrations hold great value for the book itself. By themselves, the poems are nicely written and would be of interest to someone wanting to learn trivia about the presidents. However, the illustrations are fantastic and provide the poems with the images necessary to fill out the verses. Showing these illustrations to students could help the teacher provide identifiable caricatures of certain presidents that might revoke further conversation. While those uninterested in presidential minutia will not be overly engaged with the content, they might enjoy these humorous depictions of our U.S. presidents, and may even seek other images for comparison.

Overall, the book is a charming and humorous contribution to children’s literature. Raczka completes his objective of writing a book of poems for students to access the lives of the presidents in a historical, hysterical, and mockery through the clerihew poetic form. The content avoids bias and skewering of any particular political view. The book is enjoyable, simple, and short, which would be enjoyable for anyone looking for a lighthearted view of the leaders of the United States of America.

Works Cited

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About the Author

Brad Burenheide is an associate professor in the College of Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, where he serves as the associate director of the Center for Social Studies Education. His research interests include history pedagogy, innovative pedagogy, and instructional gaming. He also works with the *We the People* program housed by the Center for Civics Education.