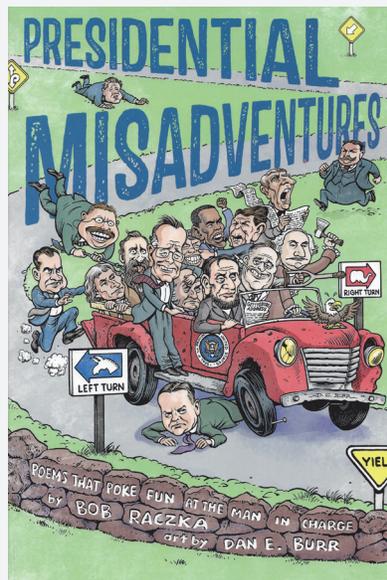


Second Reaction: Presidential Mishaps in Light Poetry

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

Jericka Garland



Presidential Misadventures: Poems That Poke Fun at the Man in Charge, written by Bob Raczka and illustrated by Dan E. Burr, is an excellent example of lighthearted humor that engages young readers in the history of our nation's leaders. Raczka takes on the simple, poetic, four-line clerihew to provide forty-three entertaining poems, which briefly sum up each president's most notable quirks. This would be a wonderful addition to any library or a useful book to utilize during President's Day or a history lesson. Students may also find this to be a great reference when learning about different types of writing styles.

While reading this book with my eight-year-old nephew, Brandt, it was easy to see that some of the figurative and complex language was easily misunderstood or questioned. The appendix was an excellent reference to provide association with the poem to the concrete meaning behind it; although, some information was still too obscure to be fully understood by a child his age, such as the reference to James K. Polk: "It's all of ours from sea to sea calling it 'Manifest Destiny'" (9). The illustrations by Burr provided additional insight into the poem, as Brandt noticed and commented on the humor within the drawings. A majority of the poems and remarks did not always seem appropriate for Brandt's age; however, he appeared engaged

and was eager to hear the next poem. He enjoyed the humor of the William H. Taft poem: “he sat down to do the rub-a-dub-dub, but due to his girth, he got stuck in the tub” (23). He also appreciated that Benjamin Harrison was afraid of the dark: “when he went to bed at night, Ben was afraid to turn out the light” (20). Brandt commented on how sometimes at night he, too, becomes afraid, and was surprised that a president would feel the same way. Brandt identified some of the poems that could be interpreted as mean or hurtful and was able to provide examples of when his peers had made him feel embarrassed or hurt.

As a speech-language pathologist, I feel the theme and concept behind the book are more appropriate for a student around ten to twelve years old. The animated feel of the book, along with the humor, could appeal to a younger audience, although some of the language and political associations may prove it difficult to keep them engaged. The structure of the clerihew is intriguing and works as a great literary genre for reading and writing historical trivia.

Presidential Misadventures is an important book to share because it breaks down barriers between students and people who are considered to be famous. It acknowledges that every person has quirks that can be turned into humor, further showing that no one is invincible to the perils of being human. Overall, I feel this book of short poems could easily be tied into the curriculum of age-appropriate students, and provide a sense of freshness for young readers as they study American history, politics, and creative writing.

Works Cited

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

About the Author

Jericka Garland (MA, CCC-SLP) is a speech-language pathologist at the Richard L. Roudebush Veteran’s Administration Medical Center in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is happily married to her wonderful husband Sean, and has three adorable, four-legged fur babies—Lexi, Layla, and Ella June.