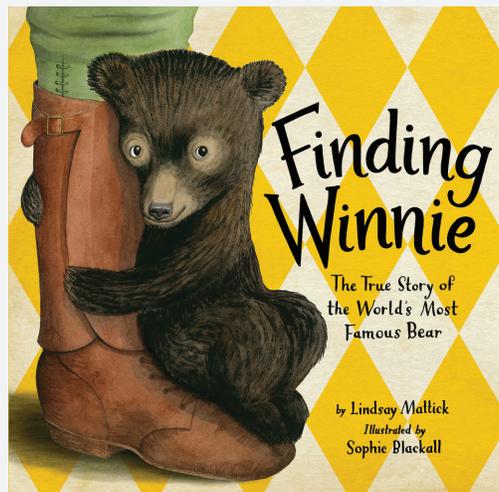


## Second Reaction: Finding Nonfiction That Can Inspire and Motivate Children

Mattick, Lindsay. *Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear*. Illustrated by Sophie Blackall, Little, Brown, 2015.

Amy Davis



When I received the book, *Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear*, written by Lindsay Mattick and illustrated by the 2016 Caldecott Award–winner Sophie Blackall, I was fascinated by the inviting cover illustrations, the storyline, and the album. As I looked over each page, I thought about the story and how children would receive it. The illustrations were bright, detailed, and inviting for young children, so I felt much anticipation to share this lovely book. Initially, I thought it might be a fictional, imaginary story about a stuffed bear, but I was pleasantly surprised. I read it to a group of fifth graders on a United States Army Installation in North Central Kansas. Since the main character was a soldier and the students lived on a military base, I knew they would connect to the story.

We discussed the cover and title of the book, and I asked if they thought the story was fiction or nonfiction. Many of the children responded with what I had initially thought: a fictional story about a stuffed bear. This group understood that the story began in the present tense with a mother telling her child a bedtime story. I pointed out the differences in the font: the italicized print represented the present and on the following pages would be her story from the past. When we reached a point in the story when Cole, Mattick's son, asks if the story is over, the children pointed out the change in font and made the connection. I asked them

if they knew where Winnipeg and London were in the world. We located both on a map in order to deepen their background knowledge. Many were fascinated by the fact that Harry only paid \$20 for Winnie, and then wondered how a bear could join the army. They were, however, saddened when he had to leave her at the London Zoo. At that point, I still don't think the children fully understood that this was a nonfiction story. When the transition came as Christopher Robin was trying to name his stuffed bear, they weren't fully aware of how this was connected to Harry and Winnie. They did, however, get very excited when they heard the name Winnie-the-Pooh. They were in disbelief that Christopher Robin was able to get into the enclosure and play with Winnie. How could a bear be so tame? When we reached the album and I pointed out that its cover page was the same as the one Cole's mother was sharing with him, they were fascinated. I shared the pictures with the children and they were in disbelief and completely engaged with the story. One child said to me, "Could that boy really play with the bear? It's a made up story right?"

The children were most taken with the story of Winnie and all of the connections to the past. In fact, many asked if we could do further research on WWI, Harry, Winnie, and A. A. Milne's stories of Winnie-the-Pooh. Sophie Blackall's award-winning illustrations lent themselves to engaging children, and the historical artifacts included in the book helped to solidify that this wasn't a fictional story. Some children asked if they could do further research on Harry and Winnie. One student said, "I'm going to go to Winnipeg and see that statue of Harry and Winnie."

I thought the story was interesting because of the way it built from a simple bedtime story to a complex retelling of historical events—Harry's acquisition of Winnie and A. A. Milne's son, Christopher Robin's interactions with Winnie. The children were touched by the events and wanted to discover more information. I do feel, however, that it would be necessary for an adult to help younger children understand the transition from present to past, in addition to the connection to the Winnie-the-Pooh character. Since the children I read to were older, they were able understand better the sequence of events. I had a wonderful experience reading this book to children because they were engaged and inspired to learn more.

### About the Author

**Amy Davis** has been a classroom teacher for six years and an ESL teacher and coach for four years. She is currently a PhD candidate at Kansas State University with a focus on early English language learner (ELL) literacy. Her research includes finding out how to build the bridge between oral language and writing fluency in ELL students.