

BOOKS TO SHARE THE FIBER FUN

BY VICKI GADBERRY

One of the ideas to evolve from the education reform movement is the belief that schools need to work more closely with the community at large, utilizing resources outside the school to enrich the curriculum. Fiber artists may have various opportunities to work with children through local arts councils, guilds, or parent-teach organizations, or as artists in residence or in-school volunteers. These are wonderful ways to share your expertise and articulate your interest with children, and also to provide them opportunities to make important connections between school and the world in which they live. Studies have shown that providing a more integrated curriculum assists students in seeing the relationships between the concepts learned in class and their application outside the classroom. As students make these connections, they become motivated, life-long learners from whom reading, writing, thinking, listening, speaking, and viewing (and perhaps weaving, spinning, or dyeing!) become authentic tasks in their everyday lives.

Reading aloud to children can stimulate the imagination. Good children's books can delight and move us and touch those emotions which truly make us human. Books can provide a chance to "participate through story in new experiences, meet new people, go new places and see new things" (Hickman).

In the interest of sharing our art and craft through books, here is a sampling of a dozen (plus one) titles with varying fiber-art themes.

Austin, Mary. THE BASKET WOMAN: A Book of Fanciful Tales For Children. New York:

AMS Press: 1969. Reprint of 1904 Boston edition. ISBN 0-404-00429-6.

Fourteen short stories, based on Pauite folk tales, are contained in this book. Austin unifies all the stories by utilizing a single storyteller, the compassionate and insightful weaving woman who lives alone in the wilderness "weaving patterns in her baskets of all she saw or thought." (Kimbel) The stories are rich, thought-provoking tales which speak to the mystical nature of both the artistry and the Native American view of life itself. Austin's ability to paint wondrous pictures with words through this waving woman, who "had an infirmity of the eyes which caused her to see everything with rainbow fringes..." provides lessons in life from which all ages can benefit. For grades 5 through adults, the book contains no illustrations.

Blood, Charles L. and Martin Link. THE GOAT IN THE RUG.

Illustrated by Nancy Winslow Parker. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1976. ISBN 0-8193-0828-5.

This is a wonderfully told story of weaving a traditional Navajo rug as seen from the goat's point of view. Simple but impressive drawings grace this sweet tale, which begins with shearing Geraldine (the storytelling goat) and proceeds with the washing, carding, spinning, and dyeing (an adventure in itself!) of her wool. It is told with humor and love and an appreciation of the art and craft of Navajo weaving. End pages pictorially define all dye plants and weaving terms used in this story for grades 1-4.

Burns, Diane. HERE'S TO EWE: Riddles about Sheep. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1990. ISBN 0-8225-2326-4.

If ewe (like most third graders!) love silly riddles, then don't be sheepish about reading this book, which will be enjoyed by readers of all ages. From baa-ginning to end it is filled with giggly grins, ridiculous riddles, and plenty o' puns which range from the cleverly cute to the really baa-d! Everything you ever wanted to know about sheep—and more!

Enderle, Judith Ross and Stephanie Gordon Tessler. SIX CREEPY

SHEEP. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mill Press, 1992. ISBN 1-56397-092-9.

For the youngster or the young at heart, this is an enthralling tale of six creepy sheep who go out trick-or-treating. Told with teasing tongue twisters, enlightening alliteration, and illuminating illustrations, these creepy sheep will make you simply smile. The book, for grades K-2, has a focus on counting skills.

Goodman, Deborah L. THE MAGIC SHUTTLE. Illustrated by Claire Wyzenbeek. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1982. ISBN 0-86528-017-7.

In this slim paperback for grades 4-7, young Emily buys a "magic shuttle" in an antique shop and discovers its true magical qualities at her mother's loom at home. Taken back in time to see how weaving evolved through history, she begins her journey in prehistoric times, moves on to Egypt, then to France, to colonial America, to Lowell, Massachusetts,

and finally back to her own hometown. Emily develops a keener appreciation both for traditional weaving and for today's art weaving. Illustrated with simple line drawings, the book includes a one-page glossary and a diagram of a loom and its parts.

Grossman, Virginia and Sylvia Long. TEN LITTLE RABBITS. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991. ISBN 0-87701-522X.

With rhyming verse and delightful illustrations, these quite endearing, appropriately dressed Native American rabbits dance, fish, hunt, play, and weave their way through the pages. The "ten sleepy weavers..." are richly adorned in ten designs from ten different tribes. Despite its simple theme, this book can be appreciated by all ages. Focusing on counting as well as Native American culture, it was written for grades K-2.

Hest, Amy. THE PURPLE COAT. Illustrated by Amy Schwartz. New York: Four Winds Press, 1986. ISBN 0-02-743640-3.

Boldly illustrated, the key to this book is revealed by Grandpa's suggestion, "Once in a while, it is good to try something new." Both a clever man and a wonderful tailor, he is able to help his granddaughter find a happy choice for a new coat unlike the navy coat she and her mother always order. Written for grades 1-4, the book deals with color, choices, feelings, and family relationships.

Heyer, Marilee. THE WEAVING OF A DREAM. New York: Viking Penguin, 1986. ISBN 0-670-80555-6.

This dramatic tale, based on an ancient Chinese legend and retold by Heyer, is a story of a magical journey to retrieve a tapestry stolen by fairies. It includes all the classic elements of love, loyalty, greed, and envy. Greatly enriched by her skillful use of color and detail, From "Shuttle Spindle & Dyepot," Summer '95.

Heyer's lavish illustrations are marvelous in themselves. I read this story over two days to classes of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders as they worked individually on a simple off-loom weaving project, and they loved it!

Juusola, Detta. HOW NIKKI SHARED HER COAT: The Story of A Happy Dog Who Kept Her Family Warm. Maple Plain, Minnesota: Woofspun Publications, 1994. ISBN 0-9639736-0-6.

This is a very sweet, true story about Nikki the Samoyed and her happy life with her loving family. Simple line drawings illustrate how she is cared for, what tricks she knows, and how she loves each member of her family in a unique way. After a visit with a friend who wishes to spin Nikki's hair, a year-long project begins of collecting, carding, spinning, and knitting the Nikki wool. Following the story are details on the hand-knitted blanket (which contains 2.3 miles of yarn and took 362 hours to knit!), plus a sample of the actual yarn, as well as details on how to collect dog hair, card, spin, and wash it. This charming book, for grades 3 and up, focuses on pet care as well as spinning and knitting.

Miles, Miska. ANNE AND THE OLD ONE. Illustrated by Peter Parnall. New York: Little, Brown, 1971. ISBN 0-316-57120-2.

A glimpse of the Navajo world where Annie lives with her mother, father, and wise old grandmother is provided in this story for grades 2-5. Though the Old One encourages Annie to learn to weave, she is not yet ready. When Grandmother announces that she will "go to the earth" when the new rug on the loom is finished, Annie does her best to thwart all attempts to complete it. Crisp and effective line drawings accentuate this touching story of love and family.

dePaola, Tomie. CHARLIE NEEDS A CLOAK. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1973. ISBN 0-13-128355-3.

This cute story is told with humor and charming, yet simple, color illustrations of Charlie the shepherd, who is in need of a new winter cloak. He starts in the spring by shearing the sheep; he then washes, cards, and spins the wool. In summer he picks pokeweed berries to make red dye, dyes the yarn, and then warps his loom. All fall he weaves the cloth, and finally cuts and sews the fabric. By winter, Charlie has his new cloak. A one-page glossary of vocabulary words used in the story is included. Children from grades K-2 will enjoy the comic assistance of Charlie's sheep and a helpful little mouse.

Sanders, Scott Russell. WARM AS WOOL. Illustrated by Helen Cogancherry. New York: Bradbury Press, 1992. ISBN 0-02-778139-9.

Based on a fragment of information found in a nineteenth-century record book, this is the story of Betsy Ward, the first pioneer to own sheep in Randolph Township, Ohio, in the early 1800s. Bright illustrations help portray the story of the Wards' move from Connecticut to Ohio, and of Betsy's struggle to buy and raise sheep so that she can spin and weave the wool to provide warm clothing for her three children. Dealing with the realities of frontier life and history, as well as spinning and weaving, the book is written for grades 4-7.

Wallace, Barbara Brooks. ARGYLE. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mill Press, 1987. ISBN 0-687-01724-6.

If you give a "hoot mon," then you will enjoy this "real" story of how argyle socks were created. It was all started by Argyle, the Scottish sheep who most loved being like all the other sheep, but one day he wandered off from the crowd and ate "hundreds of little

colored flowers.” As one might guess, life was changed from that day on for both Argyle and his owners! Bold illustrations colorfully portray this tale, which includes dyeing and knitting, and the vocabulary for each, for grades 2-4.

Whether you are reading to your child, your grandchild, nieces, nephews, children in your neighborhood, or a classroom full of children, these stories are one way to integrate fiber-art themes into their lives. These books are not just stories; they can also be integrated into more formal areas of learning, such as the following:

(1) **Use of Language:** Recognizing a pun, defining various vocabulary words, reviewing and sequencing events in the story, rewriting the story with a different ending, writing new stories.

(2) **Map skills:** Where are Ohio, Scotland, France, China, etc.?

(3) **Botany:** What plants are used in dyeing? (Some stories gave specific names.) What do they look like? Where do they grow?

(4) **Psychology:** Discussions of favorite colors, meaning of colors, family relationships, personality characteristics, death.

(5) **Art projects** which could evolve from any one or all of these books!

In addition, there are a variety of fiber-art related organizations which may be willing to send you free information to supplement your knowledge and provide possible show-and-tell items. These include the National Cotton Council of America, P.O. Box 12285, Memphis, TN 38182; The American Wool Council, c/o American Sheep Industry Association, 6911 S. Yosemite Street, Englewood, CO 80112; and the National Council for Textile Education, P.O. Box 391, Charlottesville, VA 22901.

Should you have an opportunity to work with children and any of the above titles sound appropriate (or just plain fun), check the holdings in the children’s section of your local public library. If the library does not own that title, inquire about interlibrary loan procedures and policies. Many of these titles are available to purchase

from Unicorn Books, 1338 Ross Street, Petaluma, CA 94954-6502 (1-800-BUY-YARN).

The possibilities are as far-reaching and as endless as weaving designs and weave structures! The sky is certainly the limit here, and after all, if sheep can have sheer imagination, spinners can give it a whorl, dyers can dye laughing, and weavers can warp a few minds. So please, share your love of your craft, share a book with a friend, or two, or more...

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