

## CHILDREN'S BOOK: WHALE

*The Eye of the Whale: A Rescue Story.* By Jennifer O'Connell. 2013. Tilbury House. (ISBN 9780884483359). 32 pp. Paperback. \$16.95.

*The Eye of the Whale* is a beautifully illustrated children's book that describes a 2005 incident off the coast of San Francisco in which divers freed a humpback whale caught in the tangled lines of crab traps. Near drowning, the exhausted whale lay still in the water as her rescuers cut the ropes. After she was freed, instead of leaving, she circled the divers as if in celebration and gently nudged each of them before swimming away. O'Connell's rich and skillful illustrations enhance this deceptively simple tale for students (the publisher suggests ages 5–8), giving a tangible sense of the size and strength of the whale, the vast ocean, the urgency of the rescue, and the uncanny connection made between the trapped whale and her rescuers.

It is this important connection that is central to the story, as important as the rescue itself. Certainly the lesson of humanity's responsibility to the natural world is an important message. However, the whale's seemingly joyful "dance" after being freed, her gentle touching of each of the rescuers in turn, and the strength of the shared gaze between human diver and whale all raise another fundamental question: To what degree do the humans and whale share feelings? And by extension: What emotions are common between humans and animals? A page of notes at the end of the book gives details of the incident and the divers, and prompts the reader to think about the issues of conservation and animal emotions and understanding raised by the incident. Tilbury House, a Maine-based independent

publisher specializing in books about cultural diversity, social justice, nature, environment, and maritime history, has developed a supporting "Teachers Take Note" page on their website that includes discussion prompts, notes about the emotional capabilities of whales, additional picture-book references, and several possible classroom activities related to whales, the ocean, and environmental stewardship. *The Eye of the Whale* is lovely in story and illustration. Particularly with such supporting background material, this story could be the focal point of a rewarding classroom unit on environmental responsibility and shared experience across the animal kingdom.



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## GENERAL BIOLOGY

*Little Facts of Life: 350 Mini Readings in Biology.* By Eddie Lunsford. 2013. iUniverse. (ISBN 9781475977707). 200 pp. Paperback. \$16.95.

At a time when literacy is finally getting the recognition long overdue it in science education, along comes one of the most classroom- and teacher-friendly books that this reviewer has found to date. No longer will the classroom teacher labor over many an Internet search to find that little snippet that will improve a lesson. Eddie Lunsford has done the groundwork for you. Packed with what I would term "five-minute reads," this book has the potential to change the way teachers integrate literacy-based lessons in a world where doors are being opened through the Common Core. While the entire nation

is in a state of flux regarding literacy and associated lessons, *Little Facts of Life* serves as a stepping-stone on what may prove to be a long trail ahead.

Through the organization of the book alone, Lunsford makes the leap of faith that biology is taught widely through a phylogenetic approach. While this may be true of the collegiate setting, it most certainly is not so in most high school settings. This reviewer would appreciate the book more in electronic and, therefore, searchable format. Although a paper copy seems more the norm in an educational setting, the ability to search/copy/paste/annotate functionality works much better from a pedagogical standpoint given the current electronic and paperless trend. This statement is not meant to discredit the author but rather give a pause for consideration for future editions. Another, minor, point of critique is the author's use of the term "Monera," which may cause confusion.

Each of the passages is clear, concise, and fuels discussion, inquiry, and imagination for students. Perhaps more importantly, the book has a wide array of readings so that a teacher could use several different passages in each class section and encourage an opportunity for students to "report out" what they have read and how it pertains to the current lesson. Likewise, many of the passages are little-known minutiae that readers will find intensely interesting and thought provoking. As I read it, I envisioned my students trying to "prove" each passage right or wrong, somewhat similar to a famous urban-legend website. However, to quote astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson: "The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it." Lunsford's book gives us the fuel for thought that embodies this statement. *Little Facts of Life* will prove useful on a

daily basis, regardless of how it is presented. Its potential to augment or introduce literature in the classroom is astounding.



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### THE BRAIN

***The Brain Book: Development, Function, Disorder, Health.*** By Ken Ashwell. 2012. Firefly Books. (ISBN 9781770851269). 352 pp. Hardcover. \$45.00.

As the title implies, this ambitious volume packs in information. The scope of *The Brain Book* is extensive, thoroughly covering topics ranging from normal brain development, anatomy, and chemistry to aging, abnormalities, and disorders. Initial chapters present normal anatomy and physiology: brain and spinal cord function, nerves, and central nervous system development. The brain in action follows, in discussion of the senses, movement, the “social and thinking brain,” and mood and consciousness. The final portion of the book presents an overview of disorders, including brain injury, drug use and addiction, and diseases. Thus, topics range from basic anatomy and

physiology – nerve function and parts of the brain – to specialized sections inquiring “What is language?” and a history of human language, emotions, cooperation, music and the brain, fear and anxiety, concussion and spinal cord injury, drugs and medications, and much more. Each section is extensively illustrated with photographs, historical illustrations, diagrams, micrographs, and brain images using technology such as x-ray, CT, and MRI.

*The Brain Book* is an almost overwhelming compilation of detailed facts about the brain and central nervous system. Such scope and detail packed into a single volume make this book most appropriate as a reference or for a more advanced reader. While not on the level of a medical text, the extent and level of material are demanding enough to need the some established science background. Organized somewhat like an encyclopedia, with each topic covered in an “article” of a few pages of text and illustration, *The Brain Book* would be best used as a reference for specific information on individual topics. Text and illustrations are rich in detail, demanding that the reader take in each page carefully to thoroughly understand the material. At times, particularly with the diagrams, labels can be so detailed that the reader (especially one with less anatomy background) must read very

carefully to understand the importance of the structures indicated. This level of detail is thus both an asset and a weakness: providing an excellent, thorough background for the interested student with some science background (such as an upper-level high school student), but more advanced and extensive than is appropriate for the average younger reader. Overall, this is an excellent text for the student interested in developing his or her understanding of human anatomy and physiology.



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