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Gilgamesh The Hero



Synopsis

This is one of the oldest stories in the world, and it's about things that still matter to us today: friendship, fame, courage, happiness. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are friends -- best friends. Together they can work wonders, fight monsters, brave earthquakes, travel the world! But waiting in the dark is the one enemy they can never overcome. Retold by award-winning author Geraldine McCaughrean, and illustrated with great power by David Parkins, *Gilgamesh the Hero* is a story that will linger in the imagination long after the book has been put down.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 13 years

Grade Level: 5 - 8

Customer Reviews

Grade 6-9-Long before Homer, Sumerians were creatively tackling the human condition. Their epic, preserved by other Near Eastern cultures, focuses especially on themes of friendship and mortality. Gilgamesh is overactive and oversexed (McCaughrean handles this, and a later seduction scene, discreetly), and his status affords plenty of opportunities to act out. The gods balance his personality by matching him (jaded, cultured) with Enkidu (innocent, wild). The pair finds socially constructive outlets-and then Enkidu dies. Gilgamesh suddenly understands his own vulnerability, and sets out to seek immortality. His journey echoes in the *Odyssey* and in the biblical flood story.

McCaughrean's retelling is superb. Faithful to the fragmentary originals, her adaptation adds inspired details, similes, dialogue, and description. It enriches readers' understanding without

violating the source. Unlike David Ferry's spare, poetic redaction in *Gilgamesh: A New Rendering in English Verse* (Farrar, 1992), McCaughrean grippingly and tenderly elaborates. Her language is both vernacular and classic, her pace unslacking, her characterizations deft. This volume will add luster to the author's glittering reputation. The illustrations recall Charles Keeping's bold style; Parkins's thick, dark line gains energy from its rough, unfinished edges. Unframed vignettes seem to emerge out of the text; full-page pictures spill over to the facing page. The somber palette evokes the desert setting, and the style is slightly archaic and wholly vigorous. It would be a pity if the single instance of a bare bottom in one vignette discouraged purchase: this fabulous introduction to the epic tradition deserves a wide readership. Patricia D. Lothrop, St. George's School, Newport, RI
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Gr. 6-9. McCaughrean employs her supple style in this version of the oldest recorded story in the world. Gilgamesh was a real king around 3000 B.C.E. in the Sumerian city of Uruk (now in Iraq). This tale, originally engraved on 12 stone tablets whose thousands of pieces are still studied and puzzled over, is rendered with simplicity and power. Gilgamesh finds a kindred spirit in Enkidu, the wild man, and the two of them together conquer the guardian of the forest and the bull of heaven. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh overwhelmed with the loss and terror of his own dying, goes on a long quest to find the secret of everlasting life, undergoing many trials and learning lessons. He hears the story of the flood--not much different from the biblical version. Siduri the innkeeper tells Gilgamesh the joys of life: "Children. That's the shape of happiness . . . Cherries in bed . . . Someone to sit with in the shade." Parkins' muscular images, inspired by Assyrian art and reminiscent of Leonard Fisher's art, are a fine foil for the text, which begs to be read aloud. GraceAnne DeCandido
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I loved the lyrical prose in this adaptation of the epic of Gilgamesh. My 10-year-old son enjoyed it immensely. He had read Ludmilla Zeman's more simplified trilogy of lovely picture books based on the Epic of Gilgamesh, but he enjoyed this version much more because it is a more thorough recounting of Gilgamesh's adventures. I would recommend this as independent reading for mature 10-year-olds and up, or as a read-aloud for younger children (perhaps 8 and up), as long as they aren't easily overwhelmed by violence and extreme emotion in stories; I'd recommend reading it yourself first before introducing your child to the story, as this is a violent (toward both Man and Nature) and emotional tale, and might be too stressful for some children. Note that this is not a picture book, though the few illustrations (and many graphics) are very evocative.

Must read! We love it!

love the book.

Love it,totally happy, would highly recommend!

What great example of important children lit.

We utilized this book as the first of our fall season with my book club, who have been meeting now for 19 years. Fascinating to see how many stories and other heroes of literature are drawn from this epic tale.

I checked it out of the library and then realized I had to own it.

This is a nice book and its kind of a kids version.

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