



Poetry for Young People: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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The attempt to inspire a love of poetry in children is a noble educational pursuit, and there is perhaps no easier poet with which to start than Longfellow. His easily accessible work is the stuff of legend and history, of forest and town and sea and nature—as this collection demonstrates.

Included are odes such as “Paul Revere’s Ride,” which hopefully is as well known to schoolchildren today as it was when this reviewer was required to memorize several stanzas as a fifth-grader. Other poems that may be familiar are: “Christmas Bells,” set to music by Johnny Marks in this century, and—from the epic “Song of Hiawatha”—“Hiawatha’s Childhood.” The latter could be enjoyed by children as young as five, although most of the poems in this collection are more appropriate for the older child or teen. Parents and teachers should not be surprised if reading this volume necessitates a history lesson, as included are tales of slavery, civil war and shipwrecks.

Most poems are presented in their entirety, although a few are excerpts of longer works. Schoonmaker, an associate professor of education at Columbia University, has made appropriate selections; while the adult reader may miss the full story, these shorter excerpts are not likely to tax the attention spans of the video games generation. Wallace illustrates with a masterful and beautiful hand in his first book, which should be the start of a promising career. Further enhancing the edition is a four-page biographical sketch of Longfellow along with footnote definitions of words that may be unfamiliar to children—such as scabbard, curlew and hostler.

If this volume is indicative of the quality of the entire Poetry for Young People series, then the whole collection is worth owning.

SHARON FLESHER (March / April 1999)

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