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Young Adult Fiction

Sarah May and the New Red Dress
Andrea Spalding
Andrea Spalding illustrations by Janet Wilson
Janet Wilson, illustrator
Orca Book Publishers
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Sarah May has outgrown her dress and needs a new one. In her heart she longs for a red one, but her practical parents decide on a serviceable blue one; big enough to grow into and dark enough to hide dirt. While stoically accepting the new frock, Sarah May confides her true feelings to the west wind, who advises patience. Caught outside in a rainstorm, presumably caused by the wind, Sarah is overjoyed when the dye runs out of the blue dress. Of course she is allowed to choose the new color, and thus becomes "Sarah of the sea shore, Sarah of the west wind, Sarah of the red dress." In spite of some continuity problems in the plot, Spalding has aptly captured the conflict between a nineteenth century child's longing for beauty and her parent's insistence on practicality.

Janet Wilson's watercolor landscapes are a perfect complement for this tale of pioneer spirit on the Northwest Coast. Observant readers will spy the encouraging west wind subtly painted into the clouds. Especially captivating is the illustration showing a puzzled but delighted Sarah, standing in the buggy while the rain puddle at her feet turns blue. Though the story is told as a flashback through the eyes of an elderly Sarah painting at the seashore, children will identify with the child, whose imagination captures the artist's soul.

Leigh Forrest