



Elsie's Bird

Jane Yolen , David Small (Illustrator)

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Elsie is a city girl. She loves the noise of the cobbled streets of Boston. But when her mother dies and her father moves them to the faraway prairies of Nebraska, Elsie hears only the silence, and she feels alone in the wide sea of grass. Her only comfort is her canary, Timmy Tune. But when Timmy flies out the window, Elsie is forced to run after him, into the tall grass of the prairie, where she's finally able to hear the voice of the prairie-beautiful and noisy- and she begins to feel at home. Jane Yolen and David Small create a remarkable, poetic, vividly rendered book about finding one's place in the world.

Elsie's Bird Details

Date : Published September 2nd 2010 by Philomel (a division of Penguin Young Readers Group)

ISBN : 9780399252921

Author : Jane Yolen , David Small (Illustrator)

Format : Hardcover 40 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Historical, Historical Fiction, Animals, Birds



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Download and Read Free Online Elsie's Bird Jane Yolen , David Small (Illustrator)

From Reader Review Elsie's Bird for online ebook

Kathryn says

A lovely, touching story of a young girl who moves west with her father after her mother passes away. He wants a new start, to leave the painful memories of Boston far behind. But, daughter Elise misses the city--especially the noises of the city. The prairie seems so SILENT without it. Her only comfort is the little canary she brought with her--his sweet song fills the house with music and a tie to home. Elise keeps to her house, though her father tries to entice her to explore the new world around them. But, when Elsie leaves the birdcage door open one day, it's not just the bird that escapes its "prison" as the bird AND Elsie both explore the wonders of the prairie. David Small's illustrations are, on the whole, exquisite and well suited to this tale.

Skyler Albright says

This non-fiction picture book is about a girl named Elsie who lives in the city and is a true city girl. She loves hearing the noises in Boston. But when her mother dies and her father moves them to a faraway of Nebraska, she felt very alone when her dad moved this. The only comfort she has is the comfort of her canary, Timmy Tune. Timmy then flies out of the window and Elsie is forced to run after it and experience the prairie and she begins to feel at home.

I really was not a huge fan of this story but I think students that are interested in stories about the prairie and maybe feel alone at times could connect with this story.

I would use this book in my classroom by teaching them that it is okay to feel alone but know that there are ways to make you feel better.

Stacy M. Patton says

I read this to my 3rd grader as we are studying American history. My 3rd grade son has a short attention span so living books like this are a wonderful addition to our studying of American history. This week we are learning about Nebraska Territory becoming a state and this book was an extra resource recommended for this weeks study.

This book was a sweet story about a girl and her father moving to Nebraska Territory from Boston to start over after the girls mother died. The story gives you a look into how lonely the prairie was and how hard it was to start over. I love the ending and so did my son.

Kate says

A really lovely story about the power our landscapes have to inspire and heal us ~ with the beautiful language use that Jane Yolen is known for.

Aaron says

Audience: Primary grades, reluctant readers

Appeal: Pictures magnificently portray the thought and emotions that Elsie has while her life is changing and she is dealing with a difficult loss and move. Anyone that has dealt with an unwanted change in life and has seen that change work out well can relate to this story.

Golden Sower Primary Nominee 2012-2013

Kadie Sanders says

The illustrations are complex and interesting but the coloring doesn't compliment the detail. The writing is not easily read. That is what I thought 3 years ago.

Revisiting this story, I find it absolutely lovely. I am an idiot.

Sarah Sammis says

Elsie's Bird by Jane Yolen has the distinction of being her 300th book. She explains in her blog that the book was inspired by a Smithsonian article about the madness some women were plagued with when moving from the big city out the rural territories. Those with canaries fared better for having something familiar to listen to.

Elsie is a young girl who is moving out west with her father. She has a canary, Timmy Tune, her only tie to the hustle and bustle she is leaving behind and so desperately misses. One day she lets him fly free and of course he escapes and she follows him out into the untamed grasslands that stand over her head.

When I read Elsie's Bird I had not read the Smithsonian article. Instead, I was lured to read by the gorgeous artwork done by David Small. Throughout the book Small recreates both Elsie's environment and her mood. His illustrations are worth a second look once the book is done.

Betsy says

As a kid I was read a fair amount of Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Over the years a fair amount of what I heard has faded into the mists of memory. However, there is one *Little House* scenario that stuck with me all through my childhood and cropped up recently in my adult memory as well. It is the moment when Laura and her sister find themselves lost in the tall prairie grasses and realize they might never find their way out again. That image of children lost in grass stretching high above their heads stayed with me. Then time passed and I forgot all about it. Your average New Yorker's encounter with tall grasses extends pretty much as far as the new High Line Park and no farther. Yet with the recent discovery of *Elsie's Bird*, I got my childhood memory back again. The dual Caldecott winners Jane Yolen and David Small come together at long last to tell the tale of a girl, a bird, and a prairie. It's the kind of book that will wedge its way into the minds of other child readers, causing them to also think of grass as a potential enemy and birds in the

wild as more than just background noise.

Elsie leads a happy life in Boston, even after her mother's death. However, her father finds that the city reminds him too much of his beloved wife, so he packs up Elsie and their belongings and sets off for a sod house in Nebraska to start a whole new life. Young Elsie is allowed to bring her canary Timmy Tune along with her, and he quickly becomes the one bright spot in the midst of her severe Boston homesickness. One day while her father is out, Timmy escapes from Elsie's cage and without thinking the girl plunges into the thick of the tall grasses to find him once more. What she finds along with her bird, however, is a sudden love for the songs of the prairie birds and the sheer thick of Nebraskan nature. And by the time her father returns with chickens and a dog, "Elsie loved them all for they turned her house into a true prairie home."

From the bookflap of this title we learn that Jane Yolen got the idea for this story from her husband David Stemple, "who, over his lifetime, traveled to many faraway places in the world, listening to and understanding birds." Essentially, this is a love song to the country. Now it would be easy to think that just because treacherous prairie grasses provide the beautiful and dangerous backdrop to the story that they are the central conflict in Elsie's tale. They aren't, of course. Elsie's journey requires that she not only grow accustomed to her new Nebraska home, but also send something of herself (her bird, perhaps) free within it. Timmy Tune may escape by accident the first time around, but even when Elsie recovers him again the text reads, "Gently, she put her hands around him, not like a cage to keep him in, but just to touch his golden head." The fact that Elsie chooses not to cage Timmy again, but rather lets him choose to come to her of his own free will, is an interesting distinction. The last image in the book shows Elsie hugging her new dog, and Timmy perches to her side. Free but faithful. A part of Boston and a part of the country all at once.

David Small's work on this book reminded me of nothing so much as his last picture book *That Book Woman* by Heather Henson. In both books he's placed a rural story against a natural backdrop. Both books are also have long horizontal page lengths. Interestingly, *That Book Woman* comes in at a mere 10.4" X 8.3" dimensions while *Elsie's Bird* goes taller and longer at 11.4" X 9". The result is that the reader gets to take in the sweep of Boston harbors, neighborhoods, and train stations first, and then prairie horizons, skies, and sod house interiors second. Always look to see where Small is placing the story's text within the pictures as well. He clears space for the words within each illustration, up until you get to the end of the book. There, on the final spread, the words get a page entirely of their own while on the opposite page sit Elsie, Timmy Tune, and her new dog (an escapee from *The Underneath* and *That Book Woman*, perhaps) in a picture entirely of their own.

Small's use of color proves to be entrancing as well. At first I only noticed little things about it. Sometimes Elsie distinguishes herself from her backgrounds with a thin outline of white around her body. Other times there is no white outline, and she fits deftly into the walls of her sod hut or, as with the cover, into the blue of the prairie sky. Then I noticed that she is sometimes given this white body halo when she is moving in some manner. Whether it's skipping with her jump rope, or traveling on a train, or running in and out of a prairie. Movement is often depicted with white. My favorite use of color, however, has far more to do with the bird. There is a moment when we read that after searching for her bird, Elsie notices that after singing, "Timmy Tune began to sing back, circling and circling overhead. Then he flew down, perched on her shoulder and sang out loud and long." Naturally you'd assume that Mr. Small would choose to illustrate the image of the bird on the girl's shoulder. Instead, the picture we see here is of Elsie seated beside a creek, her eyes suddenly cast upward. Below her, in the reflected water, you see the blue of her dress and the red of her hair smudged in the waves of the water. And just above the reflection's shoulder, low enough to be caught in the reflection but just a bit too high to be seen in the sky itself, is the telltale yellow smudge of Timmy Tune, circling circling circling downward.

A word or two on Small's characters. The man has an otherworldly ability with redheaded little girls. Whether it's Elizabeth Brown in *The Library*, Lydia Grace Finch in *The Gardener*, or Annabelle Bernadette Clementine Dodd in *The Friend*, the man does brilliant little girls. Elsie is no exception. As the star of this book, all other characters, even her father to some extent, are afterthoughts. The title of this book might be *Elsie's Bird* but from the cover to the title page, it is Elsie, and not her bird, that is our focus here. Watch what Mr. Small does with her face too. In Boston it's lit up from the inside. All wide bright blue eyes and small quiet smiles. In Nebraska, however, the smile fades at the sight of her sod hut. Her father, always shown with his head cut out of the frame in some way, retreats even farther into the background. Only when she has survived a trip in and out of the prairie grass do we get to see that particular smile again. And father finally gets to be pictured as more than a retreating silhouette or decapitated head.

Love songs to country living happen periodically in children's literature but when I try to conjure up names I return yet again to the Laura Ingalls Wilder books. Or maybe Sarah Plain and Tall. It's much harder to give that landscape the right feel and love in a picture book setting, yet somehow Yolen and Small have managed it together. Between the storyline and characters and Small's captivating watercolors trapped within thick black pastels, Nebraska has never been so loved. City kids will marvel as I once did at the notion of losing yourself in a vegetation usually cropped and pruned into respectable lawns. Country kids will find a soulmate in a girl so in love with a bird that she casts herself in harm's way to aid him. And parents will be equally entranced by Yolen's wordplay and Small's inventiveness. Quiet. Contained. Original. A keeper.

For ages 4-8.

Tasha says

Elsie had lived in Boston all of her life. She loved its curving streets, the horses hooves clapping on the roads, and she loved the birds that sing. She even sang their songs back to them. But after her mother died, her father decided to head west to Nebraska. The two of them took a train out west, accompanied by Elsie's new canary named Timmy Tune. When they reached Nebraska with its wide open prairie and silence, Elsie was overwhelmed by the vastness around her. She stayed in their sod house, only Timmy Tune bringing a smile to her face. Then one day when her father was gone, she accidentally left Timmy Tune's cage door open and he escaped outside. Now Elsie had to decide whether to stay safe indoors or entre the overwhelming prairie to save her friend.

Yolen's verse here is exceptional. She captures Elsie's feelings honestly, managing even in the format of a picture book to show Elsie's perspective rather than tell it. When Elsie discovers the beauty of the prairie for herself, the words descriptions of the noises she hears are crystalline and wondrous. Yolen's use of the lack of sound to impart the way that Elsie is overwhelmed is very well done. Readers themselves will hear the sudden clamor of sounds as she realizes that the prairie is far from empty.

Small's watercolor illustrations are filled with movement, whether it is a moving train or blowing blades of grass. He captures the wind, the vastness of the prairie and the mood in each illustration. As Elsie enters the prairie, the images of the tall blades of grass that threaten her safe return are dark, tangled and mysterious. Then when she realizes the beauty of the prairie, the sky opens wide and bright and the grass is bedecked in blooms. His illustrations are truly married to the story, managing to capture in pictures what Yolen has written with sounds.

Highly recommended, this is a book that has great historical interest and a superb story line. Appropriate for ages 5-7.

Andrea Cox says

by Andrea Renee Cox

A very cute story, this book shares about grief and moving and learning to appreciate one's surroundings. It's a great story to read with children.

I was not compensated for my honest review.

Dolly says

This is an absolutely wonderful tale - one of loss and heartache, starting over and resilience. Elsie's Dad is saddened by the death of his wife and decides to start a new life in the plains of Nebraska. Elsie is overwhelmed by the complete change of scenery, the quietness, and the loneliness of her new life. But the love of a small bird helps her adjust and an accident opens up her new world to her. It's a lovely, though melancholy story, with gloriously expressive watercolor illustrations. Our youngest liked the story so much she borrowed it again from her Elementary School library.

Rebecca says

Beautiful, touching story of a little girl whose father moves her from Boston to Nebraska during pioneer times, after the death of her mother. Timmy Tune, her canary, is the only thing she has to remind her of home.

Art nerd alert! If I taught an illustration class, I'd assign a study of this book (and possibly all of David Small's). This is visual storytelling at its best. Jane Yolen's words are poetry as always, and may make you choke up at the end, but it's where they are placed and spaced, and what is done with color and line, that really enriches this story. There's the cover, with Elsie running to the right and all the motion pulling you toward the right edge of the book -- compelling you to open it. There are the ink-and-brush lines, thick in the foreground and delicate, even scribbly, in the background. There are the watercolors, often left white around the central figures to make your eyes focus there. There are the compositions which reiterate the story, i.e., Elsie and her father after her mother's death, holding hands but pulling in two separate directions, subconsciously, with the text between them. Yes, you can tell from the picture that it's subconsciously -- that's how good David Small is. All of the prairie scenes are double-page spreads, enhancing the new wideness and openness of this move from the big city. And there's my favorite page, where Elsie has lost her beloved canary in the tall prairie grasses, but hears him returning to her. You see only Elsie's elated face and posture, with the bird just a yellow reflection in the creek. Brilliant.

Would be good for sharing with a child who is dealing with a new environment or a move.

Aleisa says

I

Lisa Vegan says

Splendid. Marvelous. Lovely. Wondrous. I thoroughly enjoyed both the story and the illustrations. I just love this book. A big thank you to Goodreads friend Kathryn who alerted me to it.

Small's illustrations are pitch perfect and gorgeous, and I could easily view them multiple times. I always enjoy his art.

This story is about a young city girl whose mother dies and then has to move with her father and her canary to the Midwest prairie, and how she eventually not only adjusts, but also learns to appreciate her new surroundings. I love Elsie, her father, the grandparents, the canary, the dog, the city and the prairie too. It's a terrific account of grief, joy, love, the ability to adapt, and the concept of home.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Elsie lives in Boston with her father until, after the death of her mother, he decides to move the two of them to the prairie of Nebraska. It's a big adjustment for Elsie, who is used to the sounds of the birds and the people in the city. Fortunately, she has her canary, Timmy Tune, to keep her company. But with no other children around and not hearing any other sounds of nature, she stays indoors all the time. How will she ever feel at home here? Read and find out! Frankly, I wonder how she got any education out there, but perhaps her father was one who didn't believe in educating girls. I've always enjoyed David Small's illustrations, which bring the prairie and its over-the-head weeds, to life. Still, I felt sorry for Elsie, being dragged out there by a bereaved father, who didn't seem to consider what would be best for his daughter. That's why I wasn't completely satisfied with the story, and only gave it 3 stars. Nevertheless, I do recommend it as an accurate depiction of what life was like out there at that time.
