



Shooting at the Stars

John Hendrix

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Shooting at the Stars is the moving story of a young British soldier on the front lines during World War I who experiences an unforgettable Christmas Eve. In a letter home to his mother, he describes how, despite fierce fighting earlier from both sides, Allied and German soldiers ceased firing and came together on the battlefield to celebrate the holiday. They sang carols, exchanged gifts, and even lit Christmas trees. But as the holiday came to a close, they returned to their separate trenches to await orders for the war to begin again. John Hendrix wonderfully brings this story to life, interweaving fact and fiction along with his detailed illustrations and hand-lettered text. His story celebrates the humanity and kindness that can persist even during the darkest periods of our history. Back matter includes a glossary, additional information about World War I and the Christmas Truce and its aftermath, and an archival photograph taken during the Truce.

Shooting at the Stars Details

Date : Published October 7th 2014 by Harry N. Abrams (first published October 1st 2014)

ISBN : 9781419711756

Author : John Hendrix

Format : Hardcover 40 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Historical, Historical Fiction, Holiday, Christmas, War

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From Reader Review Shooting at the Stars for online ebook

Jeremy says

Good grief, this book has all the feels. I teared up multiple times, and I just pointed at the words for Kate to finish reading. Based on a true story, powerfully dramatized here (ht: Jordan Poss).

Hapzydeco says

What a delight. Based on actual event, Hendrix juxtaposes the horror of war with the peace and joy of Christmas time.

Faith says

"For one glorious Christmas morning, war had taken a holiday."

Luisa Knight says

A vivid and powerful reminder of what really matters, not just at Christmas, but all throughout the year. That it is people that are important and forefront to everything else. Not wars; or to bring it even closer to home, nor things or schedules, or getting Christmas dinner just so, or scrambling to the front of the theater though you had to bump a few people to do so - none of it is worth it if through our stress, or busyness or frustration it causes us to jeopardize our relationships. If soldiers can lay down arms, we can smile at the post office worker after standing twenty-five minutes in line, or say hello to the cashier at the crowded grocery store, ask a stranger how they're enjoying their holiday and laugh with our children though it will set dinner on the table late.

This book captures a wonderful moment in history.

Ages: 8 - 12

#christmas #history

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Amy Rae says

The story of the Christmas Truce in World War I is pretty much tailor-made to give me the wibbles already--and it's reality. This fictional retelling of it, framed as a British soldier's letter to his mother, nearly made me cry. (The end notes *did* make me cry. They are beautifully, compassionately written. Here's a sample for you: "What interests me is the point of view of the powerless. Millions of men on both sides, isolated from the grand forces of alliances and politics, were ruthlessly caught up in the wheels of war.")

The illustrations are absolutely lovely as well, and the inclusion of glossary and bibliography at the back of the book makes this story an accessible one. This year is the hundredth anniversary of the Christmas Truce, and you could do a hell of a lot worse than to read *Shooting at the Stars* to commemorate it.

orangerful says

I had heard this story before, but Hendrix's illustrations brought it to life. I love the way the text of 'Silent Night' gently slides over no-man's land, you can almost hear the men singing. Another great book to hand to a Nathan Hale fan.

Jordan says

Beautiful short picture book about one of the few beautiful moments in one of the twentieth century's ugliest wars. This story moves me to tears every time I contemplate it—as with the famous Sainsbury's commercial three years ago, which dramatized the Christmas truce for its centenary.

This book elegantly retells the truce from the point of view of one teenaged English tommy. The pictures are excellent (trying not to keep repeating the adjective *beautiful*) and make you feel the cold and misery of a trench in the British sector as well as the warmth, peace, and joy of the truce itself.

It's clear the author has done his research, which means a lot in a book like this. A succinct introduction sets the stage, and a short note on the sad aftermath of the truce—in which, for the rest of the war, nationalism and militarism successfully suppressed the peace that comes with remembering Christ's birth—concludes the book.

A good introduction to an interesting and inspiring moment in an important era. Kids and adults could both benefit from reading this—there's lots to learn, whether about the particulars of the war, the truce itself, or the larger significance of both.

Highly recommended.

Pax in terra, merry Christmas, and *fröhliche Weihnachten*.

Mallory says

A lovely holiday reminder that it's pretty hard to have a war with someone once you've gotten to know them a little.

Barbara says

Love this book! It gives the factual account of the "Christmas truce" that spontaneously occurred in 1914. German and Allied troops in the trenches on the battlefield in France celebrated Christmas by calling an unofficial truce for the day. Enemy soldiers met in "no man's land" and exchanged food rations and played games and talked. Commanding officers were not pleased and fighting resumed as normal the next morning. Reportedly, soldiers fired not at each other, but "at the stars" the next day.

This would be an excellent read-aloud for a middle school or high school history class studying "The Great War" as it was called at the time. It could promote interesting discussion about the causes of war and what it means to the average soldier.

Bill says

Jane Addams Honor - Younger Children

Isaac Blevins says

Taking one of history's most moving stories of humanity as his subject, John Hendrix has created a complex, memorable, and ultimately gorgeous picture book. This is the sort of book that reminds us that picture books aren't just for primary grades. Taking the form of a letter home from a British soldier, the text pulls no punches in its description of the battle field. When the soldiers join together in the Christmas truce, the first thing they do is help one another bury the bodies of the dead. This does not mean, however that this is a grim book or a violent one - it is, instead, one that urges us to stop and ponder the capacity for understanding we all possess.

Hendrix' illustrations are rich and full of life and movement. His use of text and color sweep us into the story and when I looked across the no man's land and saw the German soldiers' Christmas trees I found myself stopping just as the young protagonist does...to let it soak in. I look forward to more of these historical picture books from John Hendrix - they keep getting better and better!

Janet says

Read this to some kids in my son's class before Christmas. Fortunately I didn't have time to finish it in one sitting, & had to finish it in the afternoon. If I had to read it in one go I probably would have begun crying. Beautiful story, very well-told & appropriate for youngsters. Great illustrations.

Ruth says

Love the story of Christmas 1914 and this picture book did a wonderful job of showing that spirit

Jill says

I think this fictionalized account of the famous Christmas Truce of 1914 does an excellent job of summarizing for kids not only the background of World War I but some of the moral and philosophical issues of war.

Charlie is a young British soldier who writes home to his mom to tell her about the impromptu truce and Christmas celebration that day between British and German soldiers. On that day, the soldiers entrenched along the French-Belgian border met in the center of “No Man’s Land” between the two armies. They each buried their dead, and then found themselves wishing each other Merry Christmas. Before long, they were exchanging food and gifts.

They even started playing a game of football with an empty biscuit tin as the ball. [An actual match was played between the 133rd Royal Saxon Regiment of Germany and Scottish troops, with the Germans winning the match 3 to 2.]

At the end of the day the Major appeared and was furious at the men, ordering them to be ready to fire on the German trenches when he returned. Charlie writes his mother:

“...I suspect our side will spend the rest of the night aiming high above their trench, shooting at the stars.”

The book concludes with an Author’s Note, glossary, bibliography, and even an index, highly unusual in a picture book.

The author, who is also the illustrator (and one with many, many awards), has create a hybrid of children’s book and graphic novel, which will appeal to the older group of children to whom this book is directed (the recommended age group is 8–12). The epistolary style also contributes to the graphic-novel feel. The text mixes hand-lettering with standard text blocks, and the palette switches from luminous nighttime scenes done in blues, aquas and teals to more trench-and mud-appropriate colors for the daytime scenes.

Evaluation: This is an excellent book that will show kids the “human” side of war, and help raise up many discussion questions about war generally.

Stephanie Chiaro says

Loved, loved, LOVED this book! The book told of a young, English soldier, during World War I, who wrote to his mother, in the form of letters, about Christmas in a war zone. The young soldier described what most people would have considered to be impossible, “when war had taken a holiday,” meaning how two sides, the Germans and the English, although fighting against each other, laid down their weapons to celebrate one day, a day they can postpone their long, grueling efforts of fighting and weather conditions to be merry and bright. I loved how this is a true story. It makes this book so much more impactful. To be able to take a day, where your husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, soldiers, are cold, wet, and hungry, have been fighting for months, are scared to literally let their guard down, who can’t sleep because of the uncomfortable conditions,

who are unprotected from the elements, must have been monumental for them. There are no vacations in war and it seems impossible that two sets of armies could lay down their weapons and actually enjoy spending time together. We are one great world, aren't we?

This is a good children's book to read aloud in a classroom. It introduces the idea of religious holidays but it does not push any one religion over another. In fact, the main concept here is that two sides come together to celebrate one, which seems like it would work in a classroom full of diverse cultures.
