

# Literature Guide

I have carefully selected literature titles that I feel will enhance your family's study of *Our Great Big World*. On the following pages you will find a brief description of each book, as well as some negative elements that we want you to know the books contain. The lists of negatives might seem long on some, but remember that each book contains many wonderful elements as well. I wouldn't recommend them otherwise! Please keep in mind that in recommending one book by a particular author, I am not recommending all titles that author has written.

— *Mary Evelyn Notgrass McCurdy*

# The Turtle of Oman

## by Naomi Shihab Nye

Aref Al-Amiri loves his home in Oman, a country in the Middle East. He loves the sights and the smells and the feelings that make him comfortable, but he must leave. His parents both plan to study at a university in the United States for three years, and Aref has to go, too. He doesn't want to go. He doesn't want to leave Sidi, his grandfather, even if it is only temporary. During his last week in Oman before the move, Sidi and Aref make many memories together. Aref knows that just like the turtles that return to the beaches of Oman where they were born, one day he will also return.

Reading the book aloud to your child will give you the opportunity to discuss positive and negative elements of the story. Here are a few things that you as the parent might want to know are in *The Turtle of Oman*. Page numbers are in parentheses.

- Aref likes to collect stones and he says that one particular stone is “for good luck.” (14)
- Aref takes a rock out of his family’s yard, knowing his mother doesn’t want him to. When she asks him where he got it, he replies “I don’t know.” (18)
- Aref learned that Martin Luther King Jr. jumped out of a second story window as a child after his grandmother died. (33)
- Aref’s friend runs into Aref’s house, even though his friend’s mom said they don’t have time to stay. (35)
- Aref mentions packing “stupid things, like underpants.” (97) (“Stupid” also used on page 204.)
- Aref asks if Noah’s Ark was a real boat or just a story. (198)
- Aref writes that the first turtles “lived 185 million years ago” and that some people say turtles “allowed the whole earth to be born on their backs.” (205)
- A big wind blows some curtains and Sidi says it is his Aref’s deceased grandmother welcoming him. (299)
- Aref likes turtles and says, “I bow to them.” (245)
- The author includes brief references to Islam, but does not go deeply into the religion: mention of the call to prayer (47); “Allah bless you” (79, 196); wooden prayer beads (114); “Mohammed was a very precious name” (134).

- Several times the author writes about objects having feelings. Examples include: Sidi talks of a house smiling or crying (230-231); Sidi says he needs to take care of the trees because they have a special relationship (232); Sidi gives Aref a stone and tells him to ask the stone what it knows and listen closely for the answer (256).

*The Turtle of Oman* does a good job showing what life is like for a child in modern-day Oman. Sidi tells Aref stories about what Oman was like before modernization, which shows what life was like years ago. The family relationships among Aref, his parents, and his grandfather are strong. The book is a sweet celebration of home and family.

# Akimbo of Africa

## by Alexander McCall Smith

Akimbo lives on an African game reserve where his father is the Head Ranger. Akimbo loves animals and he loves adventure, so this is a great place for him to grow up. Adventure usually means danger for Akimbo, but he is always ready for that. Be sure your children understand that they need to be careful around wild animals and that close encounters with them can be extremely dangerous. Help them know they shouldn't try to help a wild animal in distress without your permission and oversight. Akimbo's parents allow him to go on a trip with an adult they don't know very well, which is not usually the best idea!

*Akimbo of Africa*, published by Notgrass History, contains two of the Akimbo stories: *Akimbo and the Baboons* and *Akimbo and the Snakes*.

- There is no blatant evolutionary discussion in *Akimbo and the Baboons*, but the author does compare baboons to humans, saying they are “a lot like us” and live in families “just like us.”
- In the section titled “Brilliant baboon facts” the author says that baboons' most threatening predator is humans.
- In the story, Akimbo and his cousin absentmindedly wander too far from the adult they are with and end up getting lost in a dangerous environment.
- In *Akimbo and the Snakes*, Akimbo ends up in an extremely dangerous situation with a poisonous snake.

# **A Bear Called Paddington**

## **by Michael Bond**

Paddington Bear arrives in London, England, after traveling across the Pacific Ocean from “darkest Peru.” At Paddington Station he meets the Brown family, who decide to take him in as part of their family. Paddington is always finding himself in one mishap or another and the family learns that despite all the trouble he might cause, “it’s nice having a bear about the house.”

- There are some uses of the word “gosh.”
- Paddington says something “perhaps not quite so truthfully.” (49)
- Paddington receives a magic kit (called a conjuring outfit in the book) for his birthday. The kit is just for fun, but Paddington doesn’t completely understand that. He entertains his party guests by performing tricks from the kit. (Chapter 8)

# Race for the Record

## by Dave and Neta Jackson

This is a work of historical fiction loosely based on real people and some real events. Joy Ridderhof traveled extensively during the mid-1900s to make audio recordings for the purpose of sharing the gospel with people groups that had no copy of the Bible in their own language. This book centers around Alastair Sutherland, the son of Scottish missionaries to the Philippines, who partner with Joy in her work. Alastair often struggles with his attitude and priorities, but he learns a great deal about what is most important.

Children will likely have a hard time understanding all of the Scottish dialect in the dialogue. Here are a few things that you as the parent might want to know are in *Race for the Record*. Page numbers are in parentheses.

- Alastair is not happy that his mom is his teacher at the little Christian school he attends and wants to go to boarding school. (19 and elsewhere)
- Alastair has a bad attitude during church and sneaks a piece of paper out of his mom's Bible "wondering if she'd mind." (20)
- Lastani wears a "good luck charm" around his neck to "protect him from evil spirits" until he learns better. It is referenced several times. (27 and following) In the end, Lastani learns that Jesus is all the protection he needs and takes off the charm.
- Alastair is continually disrespectful. He looks at his mother sharply on 33 and sighs when his mother calls out to him on 37.
- The Sutherlands take in Lastani, an injured Palawanos boy from a mountain tribe. Alastair tries to tell him "not to pee in the garden." (34)
- A Muslim boy threatens Alastair with a knife. (41) He expresses to Lastani his negative views about Christianity and the Christians. (41, 64)
- Alastair felt a little "mad at God." (56)
- Alastair goes to the beach when he is supposed to be doing his schoolwork. (67)
- Alastair thinks what Joy Ridderhof says is "stupid" (75) and rolls his eyes at something she says. (83)
- Alastair realizes the importance of the Bible recording project and wants to help make it happen. He foolishly sneaks out of the house where he is staying and gets into an extremely dangerous (and pretty unrealistic!) situation. He realizes how "stupid" he was. (104)
- Alastair jumps off a boat to get out of the dangerous situation. (108)

# The Muddleheaded Wombat

## by Ruth Park

Ruth Park was born in New Zealand in 1917 and later moved to Australia. During the 1960s, she wrote four stories about a talking muddleheaded wombat. Her tales have been a favorite among Australian children ever since. The wombat in the story might be muddleheaded, but he is also lovable and endearing. Wombats are marsupials that live in Australia. Marsupials are mammals that have pouches to carry their young (like kangaroos).

The animals are often unkind to each other and call each other names, but they also make up and learn to appreciate each other. The edition of this book that Notgrass History offers includes all four of Ruth Park's stories about Wombat. The reading schedule we suggest includes only two of them (*The Muddleheaded Wombat* and *The Muddleheaded Wombat at School*), but your children might enjoy them all.

One of the animals calls another "stupid" on two occasions (once in the *The Muddleheaded Wombat at School* and once in *The Muddleheaded Wombat in the Treetops*, which is not one of the suggested stories). The latter story also makes reference to a goblin.

# Owls in the Family

## Farley Mowat

Farley Mowat based this delightful book on his own experience keeping owls as pets when he was a boy growing up in Canada.

Here are a few things that you as the parent might want to know are in *Owls in the Family*. Page numbers are in parentheses. Reading aloud is a great way to share fun stories such as this with your child and enables you to easily skip over words you don't want them to hear.

- The boys in the story take eggs out of nests and carry them out of the tree in their mouths. (3)
- Uses of these words: heck (5), by Gang (9), dumb (16, 75), darn and gee (52), swore (83)
- Sensitive children might be bothered by the descriptions of owl pellets (8-9) and owls eating mice. (23)
- Mr. Miller yelled some strange things good and loud (14) and drinks from an unnamed bottle that adults will recognize as an alcoholic beverage (15-16).
- Billy brings an owl in the house, even though he knows his mother would not approve. (28)
- Murray smears black paint on his face and goes to a parade as a "Zulu warrior." (47)
- The boys have heard an old story that says an Indian "was supposed to have hanged himself on that branch so the Mounties wouldn't catch him alive." (61)
- A troublemaker later refers to "the Injun's ghost." (67)
- The new minister visits Billy's mother because Billy has been skipping Sunday School. (69)



# **Juana and Lucas**

## **by Juana Medina**

Juana lives with her mother and her beloved dog, Lucas, in Bogotá, Colombia. She loves her hometown and her family. She does not love her school uniform and she definitely does not love learning English. Juana adores her grandfather and he helps her see the value in her studies. Here are a few things that you as the parent might want to know are in *Juana and Lucas*. Page numbers are in parentheses.

- Juana uses a flashlight to read in bed after her mom tells her to turn off the light. (6)  
Lucas warns Juana when her mom is coming. (9)
- Juana mentions that boys at school look at the girls' underpants under their skirts. (21)
- Juana's dad died in a fire when she was young. (31)