



Sparrow Girl

Sara Pennypacker (Illustrator) , Yoko Tanaka (illustrator)

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Ming-Li looked up and tried to imagine the sky silent, empty of birds. It was a terrible thought. Her country's leader had called sparrows the enemy of the farmers--they were eating too much grain, he said. He announced a great "Sparrow War" to banish them from China, but Ming-Li did not want to chase the birds away.

As the people of her village gathered with firecrackers and gongs to scatter the sparrows, Ming-Li held her ears and watched in dismay. The birds were falling from the trees, frightened to death! Ming-Li knew she had to do something--even if she couldn't stop the noise. Quietly, she vowed to save as many sparrows as she could, one by one...

Sparrow Girl Details

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Author : Sara Pennypacker (Illustrator) , Yoko Tanaka (illustrator)

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From Reader Review Sparrow Girl for online ebook

Lori says

ES Librarian Review: THIS STORY WAS AMAZING. I read it thinking it was just a cute story, but it was TRUE story. In 1958, Chairman Mao began The Sparrow War. Over three days, people killed at many sparrows as they could - only to create their own destruction. Without the sparrows, the locust population grew to plague proportions, contributing to a famine that killed between thirty and forty million Chinese over the next three years. -From Author's Note

Lisa Vegan says

I really liked this historical fiction picture book. I love how it shows what a huge difference one person can make. a young child in this case. I also appreciate the ecology lesson, in this case how sparrows kept the locusts away and therefore were the true protectors of the crops.

I wasn't that wild about the illustrations, though the colors, hues, and atmosphere fit the story well. The people's faces really didn't work at all for me though. I found them creepy and they detracted from the story for me.

There is a short author's note in the back of the book about the Sparrow War of 1958 in China. I'm always amazed at what goes on in the world, even events during my lifetime, of which I knew nothing. This little book was a good, quick way to learn about what happened. Now I'm interested in learning more, either by reading a historical fiction or non-fiction book. I think an adult book would have an ending less happy than the one in this book, but who knows what pockets of the Chinese population might have done. Here, if the events depicted are at all accurate, I learned how easily it is to kill sparrows. Scary!

This is a great book to show children that one person can make a difference, and that sometimes it's good to disobey, to disagree. It's also a great book to study the environment/ecosystems. I also like how it showed people can develop empathy for others. Good for independent readers and for reading aloud, one to one or to groups.

Tamsyn says

Beautiful book about "Sparrow War" of 1958 when Mao forced the Chinese people to exhaust and/or scare to death the sparrow population to save the grain for the human population. Sara Pennypacker tells the story from the perspective of Ming-Li, a young girl who is distressed by this action and decides to try and save some of the sparrows. Author's note at the end tells how the plan backfired and caused widespread famine because of the lack of insect predators. Great illustrations, too.

Kristen says

Quieter and heavier than the typical picture book. This book is based on the actual Sparrow War in 1958 in China, when Chairman Mao declared that all people were to make noise for three days to kill off the sparrows who were eating too much wheat. Of course, when the sparrows died, the locust population exploded and did even more damage. In "Sparrow Girl", Ming-Li rescues some sparrows and hides them in the barn, ensuring that there will be sparrows in the future. The art is appropriately dark, but didn't grab me. The whole book just made me feel sad - and I get that that's the point, but even the kind of hopeful ending didn't lift the mood.

Mary Kay says

This book is a historical fiction tale based on the 1958 '4 pest campaign' in China. It deals with a sensitive subject in a meaningful but child appropriate way. I have enjoyed using this book in my science class to start discussions about why each piece of a food chain is important, and how getting rid of any element has far reaching effects that might be unknown at the time.

Megan says

Beautiful, moving story about a girl who saves the sparrows as her town is trying to kill them. When locusts take over in the spring and the townpeople recognize how much they need the sparrows, they are grateful for her wisdom in saving some of the sparrows.

Concise, beautiful text - I wish there had been information in the book on the historical event that inspired this book.

I'm doing an author study in Sandy's 4th grade class so I'm reading everything I can by Sara Pennypacker.

Cara says

Sparrow Girl is about a little girl in China. Her father is a farmer and the town complains of the Sparrows eating all the rice so they devise a scheme to kill them to save their crops. The little girl is heartbroken as the birds fall dead out of the air from the noise. She enlists her brother to help her save some of the Sparrows and hide them to keep them safe.

When harvest season rolls around, the farmers don't understand why they're being plagued with insects and that crops are even lower than before, by a lot.

The brave little girl says she knows how to fix the bug problem, and leads her father and the other farms to the abandoned barn where she and her brother have been keeping the Sparrows. She tells them the birds were eating the bugs and with no birds, the bugs eat all they like. She lets the birds out and they fly free, free to enjoy any and all bugs and are now allowed to live free once more in nature and help the farmers with their battle against the bugs. Never again was there a war against the sparrows.

S says

This has everything I want in a children's book. Ming-Li is just a small girl in a village in China. Everyone is killing the sparrows because they are eating too much grain. Only Ming-Li thinks about the impact their loud noises and fireworks will have. She's the only one who asks, "What about the other birds?"

Ming-Li is brave. She finds sparrows that are still alive, barely, and she takes them home. She saves them.

Only later when the farmers realize how important the birds were to their crops, eating the insects, did they understand what a great mistake they had made.

This story is about bravery and courage. It's about doing the right thing even when everyone else is doing something harmful. Ming-Li is a fantastic and strong character and I loved every bit of this book. I'm proud to say that it even brought tears to my eyes.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Unbelievably, this story is based on a true event that happened in 1952. Mao Tse-Tung ordered all sparrows in China to be killed because he thought that they ate too much of the wheat crop. *Sparrow Girl* is the story of Ming-Li, who loved the birds and, despite the law, determined to save some of the sparrows. Pennypacker does a great job of showing, through this tale, the consequences of upsetting the balance of nature. Sadly, in real life, though the sparrow population was decimated, the wheat crop was not more abundant. Because the birds were gone, the locusts thrived, and became a swarm that ruined the crops and caused famine.

According to a note at the back of the book, between 30 and 40 million Chinese starved to death because of it. Combine this with Robert D. San Souci's *The Birds of Killingworth* for a class discussion about the interrelationship of man and birds. A 2010 Horace Mann Upstanders Award for Children's Literature Honor Book. Recommended!

littlemiao says

This is a beautifully illustrated book about a lesser known episode in 20th century Chinese history. I was really surprised, and glad, to see a children's book that dealt with the campaign to exterminate sparrows. The plot is simple and effective. The illustrations echo the imagery of the words - sparrows falling from the sky like teardrops. And while the story ends on a hopeful note of learning and regrowth, it gives a hint of the tragic and enduring impact of the slaughter of sparrows.

Barb Middleton says

Ming-Li likes birds and so does her brother who has a pet pigeon. When Chairman Mao orders war on the sparrows who are eating the wheat, Ming-Li is worried. She creeps to her brother's bed and asks him what if other birds get killed...like pigeon?

Mao tells the people to bang pots, pans, and set off firecrackers to scare the birds to death for three days. Not

only is the campaign successful, other birds die as well, including the brother's pet pigeon. Saddened by what is happening Ming-Li and her brother search for birds who have not died. They find seven birds and put them in the pigeon's now-empty cage. Because it is so crowded, Ming-Li secretly moves the birds to the barn and feeds and cares for them. When the crops begin to fail because of too many locusts, the farmers realize that they should not have killed all the sparrows who ate those insects. Find out how Ming-Li becomes a hero for her village.

This book is based on a true story when in 1958 Mao ordered all the sparrows killed because they were eating the crops. A plague of locusts came and destroyed the crops for 3 years. Thirty to forty million Chinese dies from starvation because of the failed crops. There is much to talk about with this book such as the ecological disaster, the civil disobedience of Ming-Li, and wisdom. A great read aloud.

Bernadette Kearns says

A beautifully illustrated story based on a real event: the killing of all sparrows in China during the 1950s. My 6th graders were rapt with attention as the heroic Ming-Li bravely disobeyed the orders and instead showed how small girls can bring about a miracle. The story was lovingly told and I can't rave enough about the gorgeous pictures in this book.

Deeann says

I read this one because it was suggested for a science unit on the food chain I was teaching my son. It seemed a bit below his level when I checked it out of the library, but decided to have him read it anyway. He really enjoyed it and recommended that I read it as well. I'm glad I did. It's a great story, based on real events, with a great moral. Highly recommended for all ages.

Jo says

Oh I really loved this. What a beautiful story. Sad but beautiful. The story takes place in China where war has been declared on the sparrow population. The farmers decide that sparrows are their enemies because they're eating too much grain. The next day the farmers take to the fields and shoot firecrackers into the sky to basically scare the sparrows to death.

A little Chinese girl named Ming-Li tries to make them stop and she and her older brother come up with a plan to save them. Whenever Ming-Li sees a bird fall, she runs to try and help it and any that she finds alive, she takes home with her. Ming-Li manages to save seven sparrows and she keeps them hidden in the barn where she feeds them and takes care of them all spring.

One day the farmers call a meeting to discuss how poorly their crops are doing. The plums are full of worms, weevils are eating the rice and grasshoppers are chewing through the bean stalks. They worry there will be a famine. Ming-Li, who had followed them, tells them it's because the sparrows are no longer around to eat the insects. The farmers realize she is right and that the sparrows were never their enemy.

Ming-Li then reveals the sparrows in the barn and lets them fly free again and the farmers agree that, "from this day, the sparrows will be safe in our village."

Lovely story with beautiful illustrations. There's an author's note at the end that explains what happened during the real Sparrow War in 1958. Unfortunately things didn't end as happily in real life. Without the sparrows, the locust population grew to plague proportions which contributed to a famine that killed between thirty and forty million Chinese. :(

Great message that illustrates how important each and every creature is to the eco-system. The subject is a bit heavy for younger kids, even with the happy ending.

Peacegal says

Sparrow Girl is a sweet and inspiring picture book that carries the message of kindness even in the face of incredible odds.

Set in 1950s China, the book tells the true story of Chairman Mao's "War on Sparrows" in which he commanded his people to harass songbirds to death. No birds would mean greater grain harvest, Mao reasoned. In actuality, the absence of birds just allowed swarms of locusts to decimate farmers' crops instead.

Little Ming-Li is in the middle of the chaos as her town carries out Mao's commands to frighten all of the birds for three days straight. While her family and neighbors enthusiastically participate, Ming-Li is convinced it is wrong. She and her brother (whose heart is turned after his pet pigeon becomes another casualty) elect to rescue birds as they fall from the sky. Out of thousands, they are able to save the lives of seven. Animal rescuers will no doubt relate deeply to the illustration that shows many birds raining from the sky as the children struggle to save just a few. In both the book and the real world, it seems that the flow of animals in need never seems to cease.

The theme of the story, as well as the illustrations of birds falling from the sky, is probably a bit too overwhelming for very young children. However, grade - school age kids will have a lot to take away from this humane education title.
