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**Review: A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams
(Revised)**

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A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams

By Jen Bryant

Illustrated by Melissa Sweet, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2008

DESCRIPTION:

As a child, William Carlos Williams loved with a passion two things: the sound of words, and the “gurgle, swish, and swoosh” of the Passaic River. The call of nature drew him away from his house and into the fields and woods near his home in Rutherford, New Jersey. However, even as a child, Willie knew that he must “make something of himself,” and lying by the river did not seem to be the solution. In high school, poetry transported the teen to places where he could dream of the rhythms of life and of nature. Writing poetry freed his spirit, but would not pay his bills, so Williams chose to become a doctor. Bryant tells the story of the influential poet through spare prose complemented by Williams’ own verse. Sweet’s mixed media illustrations add a feeling of authenticity as she borrows images from lines penned by the poet. Special features include: a timeline of the life of the doctor/poet, author’s and illustrator’s notes validating their research, and a suggested list for further reading. Bryant provides a discussion guide on her website for teachers who would want to use this title in their classrooms.

CRITIQUE:

This picture book/biography is an outstanding addition to the nonfiction holdings for middle through secondary school libraries. The life of Williams inspires readers because of his choice to accept the responsibility for financing his career while possessing an entirely different gift that he still made time to use. Stories from patients indicating that he was a dedicated physician with a heart for service demonstrates personal sacrifice. Acclaim for his writings verifies that Dr. Williams was deserving of the honors that he received as a poet. Bryant allows the life to speak for itself; Sweet selects colors, themes, and poems that enrich the tale. It is not surprising that this thin volume is the recipient of numerous awards.

RELATED SUBJECTS:

Authors, Biography, Collage, Creative Writing, Doctors, Free verse, Friendship, Giftedness, Mother-son relationships, Nature, New Jersey, Outdoors, Poetry, Puerto Rican American, Rivers, Talents, Words, Writing

CHARACTER THEMES:

Ambition, Caring, Compassion, Craftsmanship, Creativity, Dedication, Determination, Diligence, Discernment, Diversity, Duty, Flexibility, Friendliness, Hope, Imagination, initiative, Inspiration, Kindness, Originality, Patience, Perseverance, Resolve, Responsibility, Sacrifice, Steadfastness, Work ethic

AWARDS:

Beehive Book Award (UT), Caldecott Honor Book, Capitol Choices (DC), Charlotte Zolotow Honor Children’s Crown Award, Cybils Award Finalist, Delaware Diamonds, Junior Library Guild Selection, Keystone to Reading Book Award (PA), *Kirkus Reviews* Best Children’s Books, Lupine Award (ME), Maine Student Book Award, NCTE Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts, NCTE *Orbis Pictus* Award for Outstanding Nonfiction

for Children, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, Parents' Choice Award, *School Library Journal* Best Books, Teachers' Choices