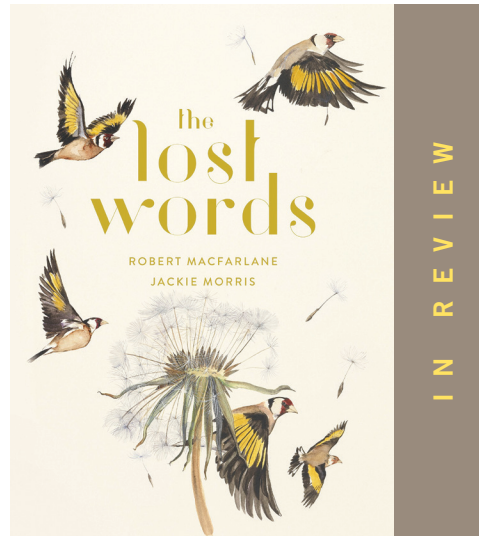


CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Jill DeVilbiss

The Lost Words

Written by Robert MacFarlane/Illustrated by Jackie Morris
London, England: Hamish Hamilton, 2017



What is the fate of words when they are taken out of the dictionary? Do they die and fade away in a cemetery of forgotten words? This is a concern of Robert MacFarlane, a self-described lover of words. When he realized nature words like acorn, bluebells, and dandelion had been removed from the *Oxford Junior Dictionary* to make room for words like blog, chatroom, and voicemail, he decided to take action to preserve them. The result is *The Lost Words*.

MacFarlane created a “spell book” with the hope that speaking aloud these spells would enable them to live on in our thoughts and speech. With stunning illustrations by Jackie Morris, MacFarlane tempts readers to consider each word. First there is a page of random letters from which children can discover the word. Then it is revealed with an acrostic poem (or spell). Each word is followed by a one-page, and then a two-page, illustration.

The book begs for music and movement to be added. Descriptive words like furred, flare, and fanned, part of the spell for the word fern, not only trickle off the tongue, but also inspire us to move. “Darts, diamond slides, sine-wave swerves, live-wire curves of force: For adder is as adder glides,” creates dynamic rhythmic images. As a lover of words, MacFarlane masterfully uses

literary techniques, such as metaphor, simile, alliteration, and meter, to create spells students will love to speak, as well as to explore and create their own compositions.

Many of the words are names of birds: crow, lark, magpie, starling, and wren. The spells give insight that helps children recognize and understand the words. From “I am Raven! I have followed men from forest edge to city scarp” children learn about the habitat of ravens. “Rock still at weir sill. Stone still at weir sill. Dead still at weir sill. Still, still at weir sill. Until, eelless at weir sill, heron magically...unstatues” describes how the heron hunts.

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Do not be deterred by the \$25-35 price of the hardback edition as you will find it is a keepsake. The book is large (14.8 x 10.8 inches), which makes it perfect for sharing with a classroom of students, who will be mesmerized by the large, double-page illustrations. Morris’s watercolor paintings are vivid and accurate, with precise details.

Another bonus: Portions of the sales from each book are donated to Action for Conservation, a charity dedicated to inspiring young people to take action for the natural world.

If you love words that describe the magic of nature, and you want to keep these words alive like songs in your heart, this is a must-have book. Children need a connection to nature and a way to describe what they experience. This book gives them the words they need—words that could someday be lost. ■

JILL DeVILBISS teaches music at Edith Bowen Laboratory School, a kindergarten through Grade 6 charter school at Utah State University (USU). She also teaches Music for Elementary School Teachers for USU. Jill holds two degrees from USU, in vocal performance and choral education. She has completed three levels of training in Kodály, three levels of Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education, and two summer courses at the Orff Institute in Salzburg, Austria. Jill served on the National Board of Trustees for the American Orff-Schulwerk Association as a Region I representative and is now a local conference chair for the 2019 National Development Conference in Salt Lake City.

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