

# CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

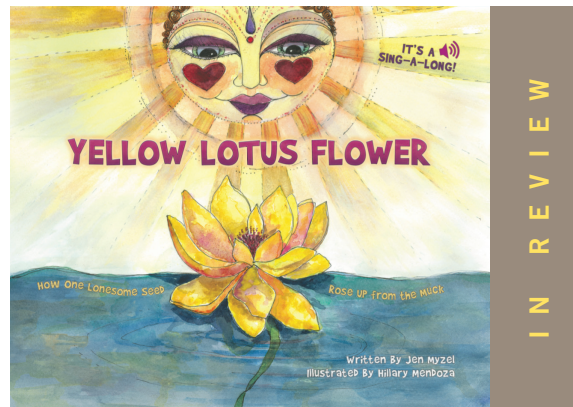
Reviewed by Martha M. O'Hehir

## Yellow Lotus Flower

Written by Jen Myzel/Illustrated by Hillary Mendoza

Self-Published: 2018

<https://www.jenmyzel.net/yellowlotusflower#>



This trade book is marketed to children, but if you possess a child-like heart at any age, Jen Myzel's sweet, clear voice will bring you from the "muck" to the sunlight. *Yellow Lotus Flower* is a parable for our day, offering a reconnection to hope. Beautifully captured in the watercolor images of Hillary Mendoza, the message of this little book is a balm for the ear, the eye, and the soul.

Joanna Macy, Buddhist scholar and founder of the group The Work That Reconnects calls *Yellow Lotus Flower* "a story for our times," charming and a blessing to one's spirit. She says it so well: In the American culture, where we all are expected to be ever optimistic, even children know times of unhappiness. We need help to navigate our way through the natural sadness, disappointment, and grief that life sometimes brings. This beautifully sung and painted metaphor from nature offers guidance and a reminder that we, like the lotus, can shine in the sunlight while being rooted in the murky nutrients of the mud. Macy is wise when she says this is more than a story. "It's for this time. Other works will follow, I'm sure. We need them, like food."

As music teachers, we have public and private lives. We have fears and challenges in our private lives, and we observe these and other obstacles facing our students and communities. Although we may try to leave our personal concerns and

opinions at home, the unique position we hold in our school communities compels us to teach access to the heart and soul of our charges and of the adults with whom we pass the torch of *life* to the next generations.

In *Yellow Lotus Flower*, Myzel directs readers to several online sites for listening to the melody and seeing videos of the song used in a classroom. The author's voice is a beautiful vocal model, and the music itself is a fresh, though at times complex, composition. Taken as a whole, its affect is music to heal the heart. Mendoza's ethereal illustrations perfectly capture the nuance of the lyrics, which comprise the text and allow for reading along as the song is played. The lyrics and artwork suggest many possibilities for movement and for discussion of feelings and self-nurturing strategies.

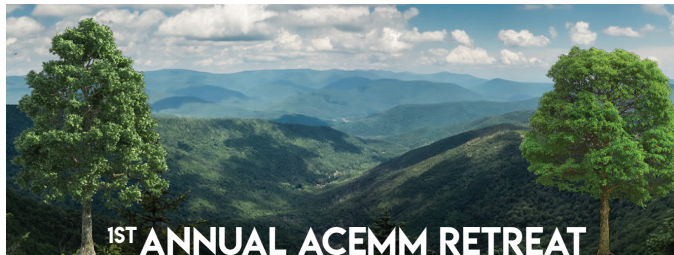
Although the book is marketed as a sing-along, and the form has repetitive melodic phrases, the melody and form may be too complex for most young children to sing without multiple hearings. Intermediate students might, however, enjoy listening carefully and capturing the form. (The lyrics are printed in full at the end of the book; the melody is not.) A talented composer could write a lovely choral piece using this song.

The yellow lotus flower is like the pioneer plants that bring nutrients up from deep in overused soil. These are often called weeds, but they supply what is needed to weakened soils, and when worked in, they bring healing and health to the soil. In much the same way, this book opens access to your students and gives

them a forum to describe what they are seeing in the world around them, what worries them, what is “muck” to them. And it gives them hope in humanity and hope in themselves. It allows us to bring reality into our classrooms in a safe way.

Although this book may not provide an ideally singable song for the youngest singers, it is inspirational. Macy believes it is the precursor of many more books that address matters of the heart through music, movement, and art. I hope as you observe the positive effects of the activities *Yellow Lotus Flower* inspires in your classroom, you will consider the opportunity to be the next authors and composers of your own books, books much like this one. ■

**MARTHA M. O'HEHIR** holds a master's degree in music education from Shenandoah Conservatory and a master's degree in educational leadership from Johns Hopkins University. She served on the editorial boards of *The Orff Echo* for nine years, *Reverberations* for six years, and co-authored the first Professional Learning Network for AOSA with a study of Keetman's *Elementaria*. She has presented sessions at AOSA's National Professional Development Conferences and is exploring the application of the Schulwerk to community music making. Over her 30-year career, she taught pre-kindergarten through high school general and choral music, elementary gifted and general education, and wrote new curricula for each of those fields. Martha is a member of *The Orff Echo* editorial board.



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Music Rhapsody . . . . .	56
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Quaver . . . . .	1
SONOR . . . . .	inside front cover
Studio 49 . . . . .	2
Teaching With Orff . . . . .	5
West Music . . . . .	13
Yamaha . . . . .	45