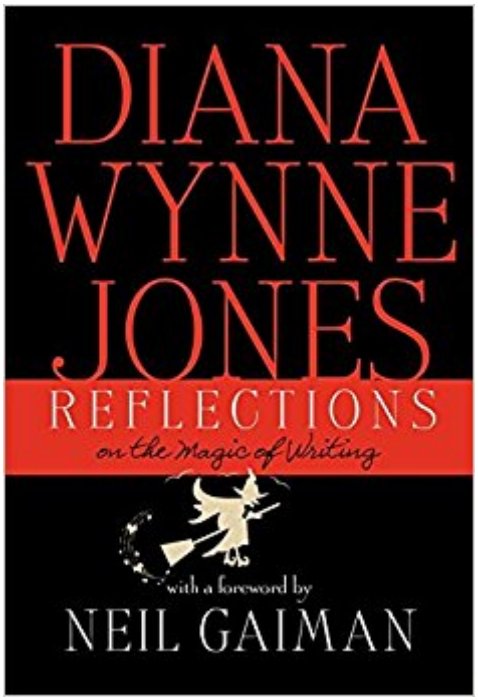
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Reflections: On The Magic Of Writing



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Synopsis

This collection of more than twenty-five critical essays, speeches, and biographical pieces chosen by Diana Wynne Jones before her death in 2011 is essential reading for the author’s many fans and for students and teachers of the fantasy genre and creative writing in general. The volume includes insightful literary criticism alongside autobiographical anecdotes, revelations about the origins of the author’s books, and reflections about the life of an author and the value of writing for young people. Reflections features the author’s final interview, a foreword by award-winning author Neil Gaiman, and an introduction by Charlie Butler, a senior lecturer in English at the University of West England in Bristol.

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Customer Reviews

Putting her papers together in the face of her impending death, Jones chose and arranged these lectures, articles, and reviews written between 1978 and 2008 to encapsulate her beliefs about writing, writing for children, and fantasy. Ranging from literary criticism to autobiography, the 28 pieces illustrate her insight, her humor, and the mastery of her craft. She describes how magic and humor work, discusses the nature of heroes, the uses of mythology, and the value of learning Anglo-Saxon. Other selections reflect on the magic of the "Narnia" books, the nature of "Real Books," and the orchestration of a narrative. Because this volume is a gathering of pieces written over many years, topics and episodes are repeated, like recurring melodies in a long piece of music. One of the most important themes is that humans-children and adults-need fantasy. In some ways, her entire oeuvre is a reaction to a childhood in which fantasy literature was denied, as revealed in

the long essay she wrote for Something About the Author and included here. An interview with the book's editor, Charlie Butler, and reminiscences by two of her sons wrap up the collection. Readers who have known and loved the author's vast body of work will nod and laugh, rejoice that they can return to works like the "Chrestomanci" series, and mourn the fact that there will be no more.-Kathleen Isaacs, Children's Literature Specialist, Pasadena, MDÃ Â (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

When Jones learned she had only a few months to live, she and her agent, Laura Cecil, began gathering together a sampling of her essays. They run the gamut: an interview with Charles Butler (author of Four British Fantasists, 2006); her own fascinating Something about the Author entry; a succinct day in the life of an author making school visits (educators take noteÃ¢â ¬â •she is not complimentary!); and her sonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s eulogy at her funeral. With an introductory explanation of why it was chosen, each selection reveals Jones in one of her charming guisesÃ¢â ¬â •much-loved childrenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fantasy author, cuddling mum reading bedtime stories, unlucky traveler, reluctant author of adult books, and perceptive philosopher on writing, especially fantasy, and especially for children. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a collection that belongs in every childrenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s literature and writing course and on every library shelf. A serious, sometimes humorous, always perceptive tutorial on how to write, why to write, and most importantly how and why to write fantasy for children, the book achieves JonesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ self-effacing and understated goal: Ã¢â ¬Å“It is my hope that some of these items will be of use to people.Ã¢â ¬Â• HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: JonesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ career spanned four decades and, in that time, she wrote more than 40 fantasy books for young people. Fans of the legendary author, who passed away in 2011, will be eager to glean her advice. Grades 8-12. --Frances Bradburn

This collection of speeches, essays, and bits and bobs from Diana Wynne Jones is wonderful, and you simply must have it if you're a DWJ person. It's arranged chronologically, so that the earliest piece (a reflection on the nature of childhood and imagination) is from 1981, and the last pieces are a final interview from a few weeks before her death in 2011 and posthumous thoughts from her sons.Some of the essays and speeches have been easily available from the official Diana Wynne Jones website, so I was just happy to have them in a more easily readable format because I've already read them twice. "Heroes" and "Inventing the Middle Ages" are both really interesting, for example.The majority of the pieces, though, were not easy to get at all. Many were new to me. There are wonderful essays on narrative, literary fashions, childhood, and fantasy. (I really

appreciated her perspective on problem novels; when DWJ first started trying to get published, virtually every story had to be about a child with a Problem, and I remember those books very well.) I was especially happy to see a long essay on the process of writing called "Some Truths About Writing." That piece showed up on the Horn Book website soon after her death, and I thought it was great, but then it disappeared after a few months and I was very sorry I hadn't saved it.I can't list everything I liked, that would be very boring, but I did especially like "Why Don't You Write Real Books?" and "The Halloween Worms" (which is a story about DWJ's well-known tendency to have her books come true at her).It should be understood that since many of these pieces are speeches or essays that were given at various times, but were almost always about writing, there are some things that get repeated several times. DWJ had a very strange childhood and certain things are mentioned fairly often. My favorite parts are about how she and her sisters got yelled at by both Arthur Ransome and Beatrix Potter, who each disliked children (or at least that was the impression she got).Good stuff. Don't miss it!

I first came to Diana Wynne-Jones through Hayao Miyazaki's movie, "Howl's Moving Castle." Its story was so casually well-imagined that it seemed too "big" for a movie. The movie mined what must have been an exceptionally well-imagined world. Reading "Reflections" confirms the depth and intensity of Ms. Wynne-Jones's imagination. And, like Neil Gaiman's introduction to "Dogsbody," it makes me want to read everything she's ever written.Both the movie and the single fiction by Ms. Wynne-Jones that I have read, "Archer's Goon," intertwine many of the themes she discusses or alludes to in the interviews, occasional speeches, and articles collected in "Reflections":- the abandoned child- the child adrift in a world of adults hapless or bamboozled or ruthlessly cunning (and sometimes all three at once) and at any rate unreliable and unable to sort out their problems by themselves- the child, left to its wits, profiting by them- the rescue of the corrupted adult world by -- and this is important -- not some sugary magical innocence calling forth an easy rescue from the reassuring hand of fate, but by the moral intelligence, sheer pragmatic sense, and willingness of the child to immediately and directly engage the world to solve her problemsWynne-Jones brings the heroic cycle down from its traditionally secure reserve in the adult world to the world of children and teenagers, turning them into active and important players in life rather than mere spectators who should listen to their elders and may be confident that will solve their problems. In so doing, she honors the incredible stress and intensity of childhood and adolescence, when so many things have dire consequences while so few are under one's control. She also honors children themselves. Wynne-Jones believes enormously in the capacity of children, and does not write "down" to them,

but rather "up" to their innate best qualities and capacities.In "Reflections," she speaks and writes tellingly of her approach to fiction, which involves and respects children rather than merely lectures them. She speaks out strongly against "problem" books being handed to children with the same problems, feeling that children with serious difficulties in life find fantasy a less stressful way to deal with the same issues. A child immersed in her difficulties on a daily basis, she claims, may find reality-based books which are too on-the-nose to be suffocating.It’s an interesting approach. As an adult, I have found books that have acknowledged my own difficulties an enormous comfort. Just knowing there are others who feel the way one does, when others all about do not, can be a sorely-needed validation in a world that is, after all, quite judgmental and prone to regard difference as error and violation, and autonomy as dissent. Nevertheless, an adult has both different needs and more developed emotional resources than does a child. It must be said that Wynne-Jones can write stories that delve deep into the heart of living in a way that both entertains and comforts. She does it so well that I find her arguments persuasive. It is clear they were arrived at and communicated with great conviction and sincerity."Reflections" paints a picture of Diana Wynne-Jones as a writer broadly and deeply educated in her field. Educated at Oxford, married to a professor of medieval literature, and having studied with Tolkien and Lewis, she learned the original languages some of the earliest classics were written in and read them in their original forms. Her path would be a daunting one for an aspiring fantasy writer to follow. Yet the pay-off manifests clearly in Wynne-Jones’s ability to bring the old myths and classics, because of their universal themes and canny construction, smoothly into books written for children and young adults that can nevertheless be rewarding to adult readers. As Diana -- so often thinking in a well-rounded way and on more than one level at once -- believed, writing this way ensures that not only will a child be entertained and challenged to think, but whoever may be reading one of her stories to a child isn’t in danger of falling asleep out of boredom or coming to dread the task.I learned a lot about the writer’s upbringing, artistic development, and theories of fantasy and fiction, highlighting in my kindle edition many incisive ideas I look forward to reading again. Parts of the book do get repetitive, as Wynne-Jones was often called on to address the same topics and had little choice but to draw on the same memories, but overall I loved "Reflections," learned a great deal, was amused, and was inspired to read more, to write more, and to think. In confidence it will do the same for others, I would give it four stars for general readers of writing essays and writer’s memoirs and five stars for the subset of those who particularly enjoy fantasy, speculative fiction of all kinds, or children’s books, as well as those who have already experienced the delight of reading any of Ms. Wynne-Jones’s books.

I am a writer and Diana Wynne Jones is very close to being my favorite author. Reading this collection about writing and being a writer, confirms my opinion. More important, when she's talking about writing she is talking about my experience as much as her own. She speaks a couple of times about how things she writes about show up soon after in her own life. That has happened to me as well. She is thoughtful about all aspects of writing and has strong opinions about how children's fiction should be approached that inspires me and validates my own inclinations.

This book is terrific. I am so glad that I did some researching. In Neil Gaiman's new book, View from the Cheap Seats, he discusses and includes his thoughts about Diana Wynne Jones, a children's author. I am interested in children's authors, and while I have only read the first two chapters, I find it will be tremendously helpful in understanding why Jones was a best-selling author and how her observations of children translated into her stories. Most importantly, it shows why children love her books!

Written by a great authors, for authors. Greatest fantasy writer ever, and is still just as great even after death. The fact that she has this book in print is a testimony for aspiring writers everywhere!

Really good. Once I got started reading it I couldn't stop, but I must admit that I skimmed a few parts which I felt re-tread other parts. If you are an adult fan of DWJ I would suggest you pick this up. Reading this made me remember all of her books again. I think I'll be re-reading them in the near future.

Great resource for research paper.

I enjoyed reading several chapters, especially her autobiograpical referencing from when she was taught, as a student of J.R Tolkien, pretty cool!

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