



## Pirates

### Children's Literature

Real pirates, Harrison's opening warns us, "were never heroes," and their lives "[were] not fun." In the twenty poems that follow, Harrison tries as hard as he can to dispel the glamour of piracy. The cycle of poems begins with pirate recruitment of homeless men sleeping with roaches. It continues to present the harsh and unyielding ship's rules and the brutal punishments for disobeying them, portray the boredom and bad food of life at sea, and leave its pirates marooned, defeated, chained, and preparing to die "without hope," meeting their fate "on hempen rope." And yet, as Harrison himself concedes, it is impossible to dispel the glamour of piracy; it simply can't be done! Because, still, a pirate "was . . . a pirate!" Harrison's poems only succeed in making the pirate life sound even more alluring, despite its seediness, squalor, hardship, and despair: "Gather 'round, ye scurvy mates, I'm signing on a crew. . . .Ha! You're rotten through and through? Ye'll do." Burr's paintings perfectly depict both the gritty realism and doomed romance of pirate life. Hyper-realistic in style, almost photographic in the detailed depiction of every aspect of pirate life and death, they have such sweep and energy, with each pirate so individuated and personalized, that readers can live out their own pirate dreams simply by turning these pages. Includes an afterword of factual information about the history of piracy, a bibliography, and an engaging note about the collaboration between the painter and that poet that produced the book. Reviewer: Claudia Mills, Ph.D.

### School Library Journal

Gr 3-6

Large realistic paintings work with 20 narrative poems to describe the nitty-gritty details of pirate life. Nothing is sugarcoated. One young man is shown tied to a post, subjected to a whipping with a cat-o'-nine-tails. "Why is it always me?/Shouldn't a broke a rule..." The young man's face and body are tensed for the expected and dreaded pain. In another piece called "Trouble," a sunburned and tattooed crew member wonders if maybe he's about to be robbed of his share of the plunder. In "Captured," two pirates are shown in shackles, facing the hangman's noose. The final poem ends, "Farewell, then./I go to settle/for my sins." Burr's illustrations do a fine job of conveying the emotions of each poem and of showing the details of dress and shipboard life. An afterword further explains the unromantic world of piracy. This is a good choice for reading aloud in classrooms studying the topic, or for children interested in the real world of pirates. -*Anne Chapman Callaghan, Racine Public Library, WI*

### Language Arts Literature Reviews, July 2009

#### Pirates

*Written by David Harrison*

*Illustrated by Dan Burr*

Wordsong, 2008, 27 pp., ISBN 978-1-59078-455-6

This book will surely fascinate kids—especially boys. Dan Burr’s paintings are lavish and appropriately grim. Given the dark subject matter, Harrison had a tricky task in this book, but he pulls it off admirably. While the book conveys the fierce spirit of these men, there is no jaunty Johnny Depp gloss here. Rather, the poems convey the sordid realities that drove men to such a life: “. . . that nursed / their bruises with their beer, / brooded, plotted revenge on life, / decided that dying as a pirate/was better than living / like / this.” Other poems convey the numbing boredom of life at sea. “Cap’n says we’ll be rich! / A pirate’s life for me! / But here I sit another day— / Another day without no pay— / Another day at sea.” Still others (“Marooned,” “Captured,” and “Farewell”) reveal the ultimate fate awaiting these maritime outlaws.

★★★★★ **Every elementary school and public library should have one!!!**

November 7, 2008

By [Patricia Jean](#) (Baltimore) - [See all my reviews](#)

I think this book is fantastic! Every young boy should live the adventures of a pirate through these fabulous illustrations and imaginative poems. I think young and old, female and male will enjoy this book as well.

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★★★★★ **ARRRR**, September 22, 2008

By [J. B. Garner](#) (Salt Lake City, UT) - [See all my reviews](#)

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REAL NAME™  
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As one who has been fascinated with pirates ever since I first saw Peter Pan, I was so excited to get my hands on this book. And as the mother of two sons, I am thrilled to see the combination of engaging poetry and vivid illustrations that can capture the imagination of young boys. The poetry is rugged and bold - not sissy stuff. And the illustrations nearly jump off the page. Every elementary school should have this book on its shelves to invite youngsters into the world of poetry and art - and pirates.

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★★★★★ **Terrific, adventurous poetry book!**, September 12, 2008

By [Laura Purdie Salas](#) (Minneapolis, MN) - [See all my reviews](#)

My book of the week this week is Pirates, a picture book poetry collection by David L. Harrison, and illustrated by Dan Burr. I love this book! This collection is emotional and sometimes violent and not a "pretty" picture of life as a pirate. I think 3rd graders or so will love it--and many other ages, too. Each poem shares a moment from the rough and dangerous life of a pirate, and each painting is gorgeous and dramatic. Terrific for boys and for any kid who thinks poetry is boring. Think again! And for kids who already like poetry--perfect!