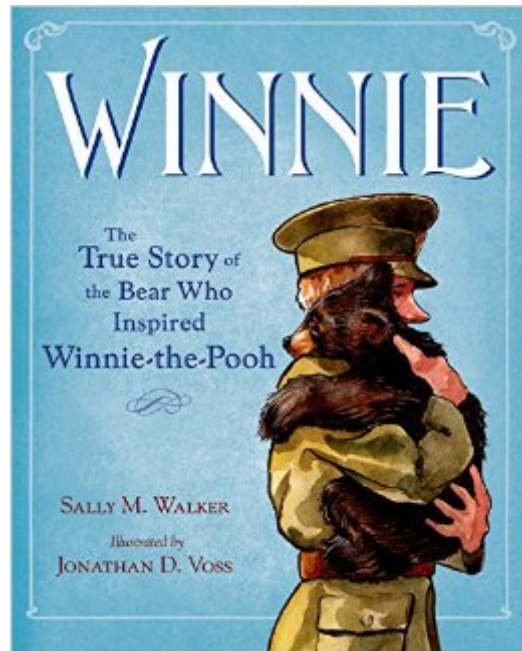


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Winnie: The True Story Of The Bear Who Inspired Winnie-the-Pooh



Synopsis

Who could care for a bear? When Harry Colebourn saw a baby bear for sale at the train station, he knew he could care for it. Harry was a veterinarian. But he was also a soldier in training for World War I. Harry named the bear Winnie, short for Winnipeg, his company's home town, and he brought her along to the training camp in England. Winnie followed Harry everywhere and slept under his cot every night. Before long, she became the regiment's much-loved mascot. But who could care for the bear when Harry had to go to the battleground in France? Harry found just the right place for Winnie while he was away—the London Zoo. There a little boy named Christopher Robin came along and played with Winnie—he could care for this bear too! Sally Walker's heartwarming story, paired with Jonathan Voss's evocative illustrations, brings to life the story of the real bear who inspired Winnie the Pooh.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 540 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 40 pages

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Language: English

ISBN-10: 0805097155

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Product Dimensions: 8.3 x 0.4 x 10.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (86 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #27,028 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > Children's Books >

Biographies > Literary #21 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History >

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

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A statue of Harry and Winnie at the London Zoo. (Photo Credit: Sally M. Walker) [View larger](#)

Author's Note When Harry bought Winnie at the White River train station in Ontario,

Canada, she was six to seven months old. Winnie died on May 12, 1934 at the age of twenty. News of her death and her connection to Winnie-the-Pooh were reported in newspapers in England, Canada, and the United States. Winnie-the-Pooh, by A.A. Milne, was published in 1926; a sequel, The House at Pooh Corner, came out in 1928. Milne also wrote two books of poetry in which Winnie-the-Pooh appears: When We Were Very Young (1924) and Now We Are Six (1927). According to Milne, Christopher Robin gave the name "Pooh" to a swan he once knew. When the swan flew off and made its home elsewhere, the name remained behind, unused. Therefore, it was available to combine with "Winnie" when Christopher Robin needed it.

As a substitute teacher, I carry the book in my school bag to read to students when there is "gap" time. The first time I read it was to 2nd graders. When I finished reading, I asked them if they liked it. All nodded but one shook her head and said, "I didn't like it: I loved it!" Third graders, 1st grade students, even fifth graders were delighted. High praise. Great way to tie fiction and non-fiction together and throw in some geography and history, too.

I worked in close proximity to the real Winnie-the-Pooh for five years. From 2006 to 2011 he was a daily delight. To clarify, I was working alongside the original Winnie-the-Pooh toys owned by the real Christopher Robin, son of A.A. Milne in New York Public Library's Central Children's Room. We had Piglet, Tigger, Kanga (no Roo), Eeyore, and Winnie himself. Though ironically I never read his books as a child, in my time as a children's librarian working in the Children's Center at 42nd Street I became well versed in his story. Winnie was purchased at Harrods for Christopher Robin who eventually named him "Winnie" after some bear he'd seen in a zoo. If pressed to conjure up facts about that zoo bear I might have been able to tell you that its name was Winnipeg, but that was about as far as my knowledge on the matter went. Sometimes it takes a children's book to learn about a children's book character. "Winnie: The True Story of the Bear That Inspired Winnie-the-Pooh" relates the true history of a man and his bear. Illustrated with aplomb by Jonathan D. Voss, the book's charm is the true measure by which you can assess how well it lives up to its namesake. Accuracy and adorableness in one small, furry package. There are many things Harry Colebourn could have purchased as his troop passed through the small train station, but what did he end up with? A baby bear. A baby black bear, if you want to be precise about it. Good natured and orphaned, Harry promptly names her "Winnie" after his company's hometown Winnipeg and she becomes the darling of his troop. When WWI calls his company

across the wide ocean, Winnie comes along. But killing fields are no place for a baby bear so it's to the London Zoo that Winnie goes. Once there, Harry promises her that when the war is done he'll take her back to Winnipeg. It's a promise he doesn't keep. Upon his return Harry sees that Winnie is not only happy but a star of the zoo. She's so gentle that children everywhere come to see her. Even a boy by the name of Christopher Robin . . .

Copious photographs of the real Winnie and Harry grace the front endpapers while Christopher Robin graces the back. There is an additional Author's Note on Harry, Winnie, and black bears as well as a Bibliography of sources. As I began reading the book I wondered if the story of Winnie would be akin to other military animal tales out there. Would Winnie aid the Allies much in the same way as Voytek in Poland or was she more of a mascot like Stubby? Neither, as it happens. Though Winnie did make it onto a boat headed for France, her keeper was smart enough to recognize that while some bears would thrive in a war zone (see: Voytek), Winnie was not one of them. Really she was just a baby and after seeing her playing and cuddling with Harry the thought of her existing in a place where bullets would fly is terrifying. This is a sweet wartime tale, perfect for reading to younger children who take things on face value and aren't aware of what WWI really entailed. The art of Jonathan D. Voss caught me by surprise. With just a half glance at the cover I initially thought the illustrator was Amy June Bates (who illustrated the somewhat similar *Christian the Hugging Lion* back in 2010). An understandable mistake but once I actually went so far as to, oh I dunno LOOK at the book, I could see that Voss has a crisper line as well as a sure and steady grasp on the material. This being the first picture book that he has illustrated, he does a good job of making some really iconic images. The view on the cover of Harry hugging Winnie to his chest, as one might cuddle an infant, is downright heartwarming. Likewise the image of Winnie asleep under Harry's cot as his long arm drapes down, his wrist bending in sleep, works. And if the four shots of Harry playing with Winnie were a YouTube video they'd get more hits than any other cute animal video to date. There is the occasional misstep, I'm afraid. A boy riding Winnie later in the book bears the slack-jawed look of a very small grown man and not a little boy. Indeed Voss appears to be most comfortable when Winnie is his focus. There's not a single image where that bear doesn't feel 100% authentic. One suspects the artist spent a great deal of time studying baby black bears and how they move. He also does a decent job of rendering the stuffed Pooh accurately. The arms are admittedly a bit long but the stance and nose are on target. One objection I've heard to the story is that there isn't enough Christopher Robin / real Winnie-the-Pooh info included in this story. I can see where this critic is coming from but I respectfully disagree. To my mind,

Winnie-the-Pooh's story is fascinating in and of itself regardless of what famous literary character she ended up inspiring on some level. Hers is a story of tragedy turned to great good luck. Few orphaned bears in the WWI era would have found such a caring owner, let alone one that let them travel to Europe. Her life was notable at the time and makes for no less an interesting story today. For my part, the book gets into tricky territory when we view the quoted dialog. Now Ms. Walker is a known entity. She does this stuff for a living. Wins big nonfiction awards like the Sibert for "Secrets of a Civil War Submarine" and the like. So when we get to a section where Harry is quoted saying "I'll feed her condensed milk. She can stay with me in camp. Winnipeg can be our mascot," then we have to naturally assume that the quote comes from one of the listed sources Walker provides at the back of the book. The quotes are not sourced but since Harry's diary is one of those aforementioned sources, there's a strong likelihood that the quotes come from there. I'm giving the book the benefit of the doubt in this matter, since faux dialog is the bane of the modern nonfiction picture book. Read this book and few will wonder that after seeing Winnie in person, Christopher Robin wanted a bear of his very own. Indeed, the vast majority of children who are read "Winnie-the-Pooh" may think to themselves (or say out loud) at some point, "When do I get my own?" Sorry, kids. If it's any consolation you can see the Winnie-the-Pooh toys in the main New York Public Library location anytime the building is open. Maybe it won't be the same as getting to ride a sweet bear in the zoo, but it's still a part of this story on some level. Cute, not saccharine, and pleasing to boot, this is one story-behind-the-story kids will definitely appreciate. Lovers of Pooh welcome but not required. For ages 4-7.

This is a wonderful children's book. The amount of details and the pictures are just right for elementary aged kids, but even an older child (or adult) will likely be interested. Winnie-the-Pooh is familiar to nearly everyone, so it is nice to get the story of the real bear who inspired the story. It is a quick read, and the story is touching. There are pictures of the real bear and the real Christopher Robin and his father. It is a very nice to see the real faces behind the stories we all know and love.

I always knew that Winnie-the-Pooh was inspired by a real bear, but I never knew the actual story about how that bear came to inspire A.A. Milne's book. Told in a story format for all children to understand and enjoy, we learn about where the bear was found, how she was loved and brought to England, and how the famous author came to meet her. During a quick train stop, Harry sees a bear and needs to know why there is a bear on a leash on the platform. He immediately runs off the train

to see. And ends up buying the bear and bringing it with him to army training camp. I don't think Harry, who names the bear Winnipeg, ever thought that he would be caring for a bear while taking care of the army's horses during the war. And especially never could have foreseen how she would change everyone's lives, bring so much love and joy to those around her and would later go on to become one of the most famous bears in the world. What my kids and I enjoyed the most is being able to see black and white photos of Harry, Winnie and other persons mentioned in the book. Along with the grand illustrations, which were precise with age and historical aspects, Winnie's story not only came to life for us, but it felt like we were there, alongside all the characters, discovering this sweet little bear and the world around her. This is the perfect book for all who love Pooh, history and, also, those with lively imaginations that will allow them to hop on the train with Harry and Winnie and experience a wonderful adventure.*An ARC was sent to me from the publisher for an honest review. All thoughts are my own.

Love, love, love the story, the illustrations, and the whole idea that the story is based on truth! The end pages have prints of the real "Winnie" bear and Christopher Robin--very cool stuff.

Touchingly and beautifully illustrated and written, "Winnie" shows the bonds between animals and humans, in the form of a baby bear who responded with love to the soldier who rescued her and to the regiment whose mascot she became. A legend from her days at the London Zoo, Winnie never forgot "her" soldier, who made certain she enjoyed a happy, safe life. Children and adults alike will love this book.

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