Book: Bird Girl and the Man Who Followed the Sun, by Velma Wallis

Reviewed by: Michele R. Ramos

Level of Difficulty: Intermediate

My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:

Bird Girl and the Man Who Followed the Sun is a book about two different Native American legends. Bird Girl is a headstrong stubborn woman who rejects the traditional woman’s role in her tribe and instead learns masculine skills. Daagoo is a restless wonderer who would rather explore than fulfill his duties and contribute to his tribe. Each decides to eventually run away from their roles and duties and each suffer the tragic and horrific consequences of their decisions. The work switches back and forth from the perspective of Bird Girl and Daagoo as parallel stories.

The reading level was adequate for my group, particularly because I had students with mixed needs. For example, some were more at an easy reader level, others were at an intermediate level, and some were more at a higher difficulty level of reading. Because the story is a Native American legend, many of the unfamiliar words were names of animals, plants, tools, clothing, dwellings, or specific names in the Native American language.

Students’ reaction to the book:

The students reacted with lots of sadness, surprise, and sometimes confusion or laughter, usually with unfamiliar terms, especially Native American specific names. Overall, the students were very engaged with the work and the discussion questions. However, because the book switches back and forth from the perspective of Bird Girl and Daagoo each week, sometimes my students found it difficult to recall where each story left off.

Tips for other tutors who may want to use this book:

Just be warned that there is quite a lot of suffering, violence, and tragedy in this book and a good alternative text might be Two Old Women, also by Velma Wallis. However, there is also great fuel for discussion of the overall meaning of the legends and the wisdom or lessons learned by the characters.

To fit the needs of the group, I mainly designed my chapter discussion questions to be reading and comprehension-based questions, rather than critical, speculative, or open-ended questions. My students found these discussion questions to be very helpful and some took the time to take the questions home and write responses outside of class.