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Squirrel and John Muir

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McCully, Emily Arnold. *Squirrel and John Muir*. Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 2004. ISBN 0374336970. \$16.00. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical Fiction;

Subject: Muir, John, 1838-1914--Juvenile Fiction; Yosemite Valley (Calif.)--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Six year-old Floy, nicknamed Squirrel, met John Muir in Yosemite in 1868, when her father, English journalist James Hutchings, employed Muir to run his sawmill and help improve his hotel. Although the actual events in this story are conjecture, McCully portrays what could have happened as Squirrel, an outspoken and independent tomboy, accompanies Muir, the budding naturalist, as he explores the flora and fauna of the Yosemite Valley. Muir not only sees nature, but feels it, hears it, speaks to it, and experiences it first-hand, as when he climbed up a tall tree and swayed back and forth during a thunderstorm. He encourages Floy to take a second look at what she first considers to be ordinary creatures or objects in nature.

McCully's story is heart-warming. Her life-like water-color illustrations capture the beauty of the Yosemite Valley and the changing expressions of the characters - from Squirrel's pesky wildness to Muir's exhilarating wonder as he listens for the sound of falling snowflakes or contemplates what it feels like to be a river rock. This could be used in the elementary school classroom to introduce a nature unit or in the home during regular story time or before a family's nature walk.