



2005

The young Hans Christian Andersen

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Hesse, Karen. *The young Hans Christian Andersen*. Illustrated by Erik Blegvad. Scholastic Press, 2005. ISBN 0439679907. \$16.99. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Andersen, H.C. (Hans Christian), 1805-1875--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Hans Christian Andersen's family was poor. A gangly and homely appearance made him an ugly duckling. His tender heart often met with ridicule and rejection, but his cobbler father loved him and taught him wonderful things and his grandmother doted on him. The old women in the hospital where his grandmother worked told him the folklore of Denmark and he was captivated by the works of playwright Holberg and the Odense Theatre. His father, who idolized Napoleon, became a soldier, contracted tuberculosis, and returned home to die when Andersen was eleven. A pleasant soprano voice gave Hans Christian a position in the wealthy homes of Odense, and he reveled in the attention and riches. The money he earned provided the means to go to Copenhagen to try his talents in the theatre and to fulfill his promise, "I shall be famous."

Echoing the lyrical, descriptive style of Andersen, Hesse has created story-like vignettes of the life of young Hans Christian Andersen that engage the reader's senses and imagination. The brief text is packed with insightful details about Andersen's personality and determination, and chapter headings suggest connections between childhood events and his fairy tales. Illustrator Blegvad, who previously illustrated and translated some of Andersen's tales into English, has used pen and ink with watercolors that capture the mood, time, and place. Hesse's research is documented in the bibliography that includes selected works of Andersen, several scholarly biographies and one of Andersen's own autobiographies, *The Fairly Tale of My Life*. An afterword encapsulates Andersen's career and the realization of his celebrity aspirations. A noteworthy biography for public and school library collections and for Andersen fans young and old.