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The First Marathon: The Legend of Pheidippides

Sarah Wanlass

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Reviewer: Sarah Wanlass
Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate, All
Rating: Dependable
Genre: Picture books; Informational books; Folklore;
Subject: Marathon, Battle of, Greece, 490 B.C.--Juvenile literature; Pheidippides, fl. 490 B.C.--Juvenile literature; Marathon running--History--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

The legend of the first marathon comes alive in Reynolds's retelling. This ancient piece of folklore explains how marathons came to be. During a Persian invasion, the running talents of Pheidippides, a young soldier, prove valuable to the Athenians. The Athenian army, vastly outnumbered by the Persians, sends Pheidippides as a messenger to Sparta with a plea for reinforcements. According to legend, Pheidippides made the 140 mile trip in a thirty-six hour run. Then he ran back to join his fellow soldiers. After a ferocious battle, he made a last run from the battlegrounds at Marathon to Athens to announce victory. The text then turns to the present, relating the story to the mass long-distance race it is today.

Reynolds's narrative is lively, if a little contrived in flow and word choice. The bibliography and historical notes in the back of the book add to its value. Minter's flat, 2-D, illustrations, with their geometric borders, breathe Greco-Roman. The colors are bright and alluring.

The First Marathon is a great book for would-be marathoners or anyone interested in ancient Grecian legends. Children and adults alike will enjoy the legend behind the race. It makes a good choice for school and home libraries.