Ten Best Books

James Jacobs

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Many fantasies explore the struggles between good and evil, but this five-book series has memorable characters, rich language, and a certain magic which make it my favorite of the genre.

Armstrong, William. *Sour Land.*
Moses Waters is an old black man who has made his peace with the world despite the racially tense circumstances in the South where he lives. Armstrong tells Waters' story in understated, eloquent prose, and has made him one of my personal heroes.

Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting.*
A finely-woven fantasy which showed me a positive side of aging and death I had not considered. In addition, the story is logical, tight and a pleasure to read solely for its expert craftsmanship.

Eckert, Allan. *Incident at Hawk's Hill.*
Based upon a true incident of a boy living with a badger, Eckert's story is perhaps more touching for me as an adult than it would have been had I read it as I read it as a child. I can now appreciate both the father and the son as the two, who are very different and not close, come to understand and love each other.

Stunning, detailed art gives a whole new perspective to this ancient story, and Jarrell's descriptions and musical language give me continuing pleasure long after I have closed the cover. A wonderful marriage between art and text where each brings out the best in the other.

Kroeber, Theodora. *Ishi.*
The Yahi Indian had always lived in northern California but hid from the white people who came, stayed, and spread out. The Yahi dwindled until only Ishi was left. He spent his last years with an anthropologist, told him everything about his life, and took him back to the lands he remembered. Even if poorly told, this story would stick
with me. Fortunately it is written with the flavor of the Yahi, which makes the telling that much more powerful.

Ottley, Reginald. *Brumbie Dust.*

No longer in print, Ottley's nine stories about life in the great and desolate Australian outback as a cattle drover show me a life few have lived and fewer have described. He lived his stories, and did not write until he became too old for the harsh life in some of the world's most uninviting territory. Like his daily existence, Ottley's prose is lean, direct and unforgettable.


Largely autobiographical, this look at life in rural Vermont during the 1920's stays with me--especially the relationship between an honorable but poor man and his young son who love each other completely yet never speak of or show that deep affection.

Turkle, Brinton. *Do Not Open.*

The more I look at this picture book, the more care I find in both Turkle's art and text. I consider his monster the best in any picture book, and the subtle details and surprises continue to unfold as I read and reread this satisfying story.

Ventura, Piero. *Great Painters.*

I did not succeed in a required art appreciation class at college, and have not felt entirely comfortable with art since. Ventura took the same subject matter, organized it, linked it together by using his own drawings, and produced a book of fact which reads like a story. A masterful job of digesting a subject without removing any of the nutrients.