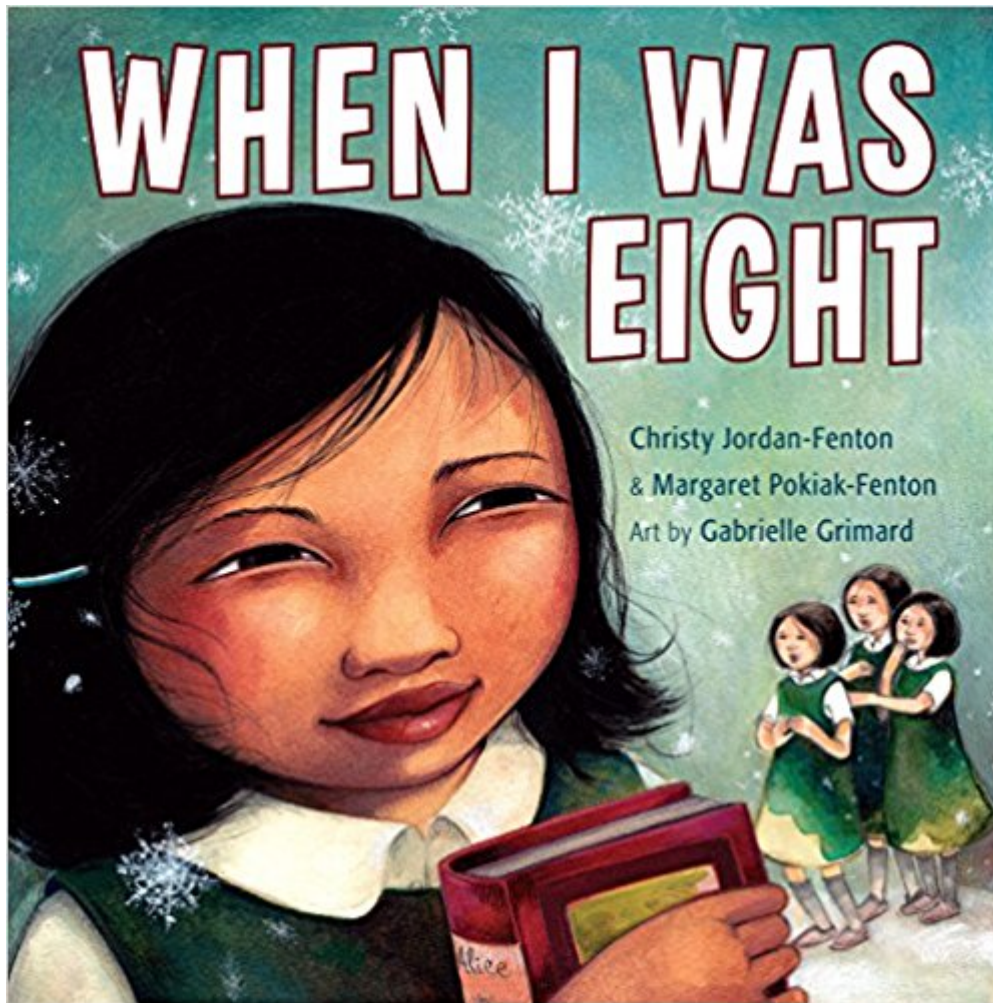




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When I Was Eight



Synopsis

Bestselling memoir *Fatty Legs* for younger readers. Olemaun is eight and knows a lot of things. But she does not know how to read. Ignoring her father's warnings, she travels far from her Arctic home to the outsiders' school to learn. The nuns at the school call her Margaret. They cut off her long hair and force her to do menial chores, but she remains undaunted. Her tenacity draws the attention of a black-cloaked nun who tries to break her spirit at every turn. But the young girl is more determined than ever to learn how to read. Based on the true story of Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, and complemented by stunning illustrations, *When I Was Eight* makes the bestselling *Fatty Legs* accessible to younger readers. Now they, too, can meet this remarkable girl who reminds us what power we hold when we can read.

Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 7 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

Customer Reviews

K-Gr 4-This condensed, illustrated version of *Fatty Legs* (Annick, 2010) brings the power of literacy to even younger children. An eight-year-old Inuit child from Banks Island in far northern Canada desperately wanted to learn to read English like her older sister, but her father refused to let her attend the Indian Residential School. However, her persistent pleading wore away his resistance, and he consented. They made the five-day trek to the Catholic-run school where Olemaun was stripped of her Native identity-her hair, her clothes, even her name. She was allowed to keep only

her beloved copy of *Alice in Wonderland*. Renamed Margaret, she clung to her desire to learn to read, enduring humiliation and harsh treatment from cruel nuns and unkind classmates. She instinctively knew that literacy was powerful, and she used it to give her courage and "to carry [her] far away from the laughter." In a showdown with a nun, Margaret defied the insensitive teacher, who in turn tried to humiliate Margaret by demanding that she read a difficult passage aloud in class. However, she read without hesitation and triumphed. "There was no stopping me" is an accurate description of what happens when someone-child or adult-learns to read. Sprinkled throughout are details of Inuit life. The beautiful, expressive watercolor illustrations depict Margaret's journey from her village to the misery of residential school to her success. This book is a small but powerful reminder of the freedom that literacy brings.-Lisa Crandall, formerly at the Capital Area District Library, Holt, MI (c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

In this picture-book memoir, an adaption of *Fatty Legs* (2010), Olemaun (later known as Margaret) an Inuit, recounts how she begged her father to attend the church-run Indian residential school so she could fulfill her cherished dream to learn to read. Once there, what she discovers is the school is draconian. Using a simple, direct tone, Olemaun describes how a nun cuts her braid, changes her name, and assigns an endless list of chores. Classmates tease. Even as she labors, Olemaun finds strength in memories of her father's love and uses every opportunity to study the alphabet and sound out words. Effective shadow-ridden illustrations capture the pervasive atmosphere of abuse, but the final picture speaks volumes about Olemaun's determination and triumph: her face appears as large and shining as the sun emerging from darkness, because she has taught herself to read. A historical note providing context would have been helpful, but advanced readers can turn to the author's longer work. A searing account of assimilation policies and a celebration of the human spirit. Grades 1-3. --Jeanne McDermott

In *When I Was Eight* readers get to see what it was like for a young Inuit girl to leave her family for a residential school. There are some very negative experiences there for her, but it is also a time for her to discover her own strength and determination. I have been happy to see more and more children's literature and non-fiction about the residential school era in North America. This is a time in history that our country should know about and should remember. I think there has been healing in the sharing of these stories and the more people that hear them, the better off we all are. This also fills a gap that we have. I am looking forward to more picture book memoirs like this.

True story told well, glad for my grand children to realize not all have even same education.

A moving story that is great to use as a read-aloud.

love it

great pictures probably wouldn't read it as a picture book to younger kids b/c it's a bit "scary" with the Raven (evil teacher)

We read "When I Was Eight" for our homeschool history study. We also read "Not My Girl". I recommend reading both books together for a more complete picture of Olemaun's experiences. Both books were beautifully written and illustrated, and made even more special because they are true. Written from the perspective of an eight year old child, "When I Was Eight" was very accessible for my second grader, and she really connected to Olemaun, and the story of being bullied by an adult (a mean nun) and having to be resourceful and tenacious in order to survive and thrive in an alien and hostile environment (the school). Written from the perspective of a ten year old in "Not My Girl", Olemaun has feelings of not fitting in when she returned to her family, but there is so much love and patience from her parents that she finally feels at home again. We loved both of these books so much we are planning to also read the longer books as well ("Fatty Legs" and "A Stranger at Home"). Thank you to the authors and illustrator for such a valuable document written for children. This review was written by alias "Jumping Fish", age seven: "I read the book "When I Was Eight". The little girl in the story has to go to a "Indian" school. Her name is Olemaun. The nun at the school is not nice. It is good, good, good !!! Olemaun is strong and nice. She understood that nun was trying to get a reaction and she ignored her."

When I Was Eight by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton is an adaptation of Fatty Legs, in which Olemaun recollects her negative experiences in a church-run residential school. Because I have read both books, as I review When I Was Eight, I will also be comparing and contrasting the two versions. I'll start with what I liked about When I Was Eight. The well-crafted writing style stands out more in When I Was Eight. There are many active verbs, such as "shrugged" and "begged". In addition, there's a lot of figurative language, such as "the sun slept" and "slumbering ice". The strong word choices exist in Fatty Legs too, but they feel more prevalent

and significant in a picture book. *When I Was Eight* would make for an excellent mentor text in elementary schools. *When I Was Eight* is also more focused than *Fatty Legs*. The latter is about Olemaun (Margaret's Inuit name) and her family, her friends, her desire to read, her conflicts with a mean nun and brother, and more. In contrast, *When I Was Eight* is solely about Oleman's determination to read enabling her to withstand all forms of abuse from a nameless nun. In fact, the story is so tightly told that it develops a fairy tale quality, where the young heroine must battle an evil grown-up. Because of its overt theme, teachers could use *When I Was Eight* to help reluctant readers see how the power of books can change them. Next, I'll turn to what I didn't like about *When I Was Eight*. Due to the brevity of text required of a picture book, some important details were left out. For example, *When I Was Eight* tells readers that Olemaun enters the laundry room, stands beside a huge vat, and then "gets an idea" about how to get rid of the red stockings. In contrast, *Fatty Legs* tells readers how a tear vanishing into bubbling water gives her that idea. In my review of *Fatty Legs*, I highlighted its realistic characters because sometimes books that depict atrocities resort to portraying all of the "enemy" as evil but *Fatty Legs* avoided that trap. Well.... as I review *When I Was Eight* has eliminated the friend who provided support to Olemaun, and the kind nun, and really anyone who seemed nice. Instead Olemaun is on her own in her determination to read. Some critics have lamented the absence of a historical note in as I review *When I Was Eight*. I have mixed feelings about this. On one hand, in *Fatty Legs* I greatly appreciated the scrapbook and other supplementary material that provided context for the story. I ended up wanting to read more Inuit stories. On the other hand, the historical notes meant while reading *Fatty Legs* I remained keenly aware that I was learning about a real time and a real place. Whereas, as I noted above, *When I Was Eight* was more like a fairy tale. Both approaches serve a purpose, as does having two versions that are intended for different readers. Each book provides a glimpse into the way of life of the Inuit, while also containing an inspiring universal message. There are two more books in the set, another chapter and picture book combo. It'll be interesting to see what Christy Jordan-Fenton writes next about her mother-in-law's experiences of growing up Inuit.

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