**3 Pre-release reviews (Midwest Book Review, Reedsy Discovery, Wisconsin Writers Association)**

Children’s Picture Book ***Sophia Discovers the Real Treasure*** by Curt Casetta

Trenton House Publishing, West Bend, WI (TrentonHousePublishing.com/TrentonHousePublishing@gmail.com)

ISBN:        978-1-956224-02-3 (Paperback);   978-1-956224-03-0 (Hardcover)

                  Price: $12.99 (Paperback); $23.99 (Hardcover)

**Available March 20, 2022, at Amazon.com, pre-release copies can be ordered at TrentonHousePublishing.com**

1. **Review by D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review (appearing March, 2022)**

*Sophia Discovers the Real Treasure: A Story of John Muir, Father of the National Parks* provides children with a picture book story that goes beyond the usual biographical focus of the naturalist and his contribution to forming the national parks system in America.

 It includes the added bonus of reflections on Native American connections to the land, their experiences with white people, and how they and Muir shared a love of the land.

 Most of all, it's the unique young narrator's voice, as lessons are given on all these elements, that will draw even reluctant young learners into the story: *"Seriously? Grandma drags me to an old ranch to hear an old guy talk about another old guy who talked about nature? Why would I want to talk about that?! BOR-ing! So, while she’s taking a tour, I’m on a bench near this big, red pine tree. 'It’s NOT a pine tree,' Grandma says, 'it’s a sequoia.'\* Okay, so, I’m on a bench near this big, red sequoia. Some guy, John Muir,\*\* planted it about a hundred years ago. Grandma says it’s dying. I should sit here and appreciate it. Big deal."*

Footnotes lead to boxes of definitions which pepper the account as an elderly man (who looks like a prospector) engages a young girl to review Muir's life and, more importantly, his concepts about wilderness and preservation.

The inviting dialogue uses a storyteller's compelling voice to draw readers into Muir's story: *"Red smiles. 'John never been bored. He appreciated the nature all around him.' He coughs. 'You’ll have to excuse me, I ain’t been feeling too good.' He pats the donkey. 'Let’s saunter, as John liked to call it. Maybe you’ll find some treasure yourself.'"*

 The artwork is just as vivid and diverse as the story that emerges—a blend of appealing, cartoon-like figures; artistic backgrounds; and lovely digitally-altered photos of California's natural areas, which Muir loved and determined to preserve.

 The result is far more multifaceted than any singular review of Muir's life or impact. It reads with the drama and excitement of fiction, but packs in much information about Native American and natural history as it reviews the political and social forces that influenced Muir's ability to save these lands for future generations.

If only one book about John Muir were to be selected for a discriminating picture book collection, it should be *Sophia Discovers the Real Treasure.*Designed to appeal to young audiences normally reluctant to read nonfiction presentations, it will appeal to a wide audience of readers with a vivid, action-packed story firmly rooted in historical facts and information, delighting young readers and adults alike.

1. **Review by Paulette Reefer, Reedsy Discovery Reviews (appearing March, 2022)**

FIVE STARS/Must read. *Sophia Discovers the Real Treasure* engenders a passion for the glorious wilderness and the indigenous people who once dwelled therein.

Curt Casetta’s *Sophia Discovers the Real Treasure: A Story of John Muir, Father of the National Parks* unfurls a light, playful and witty historical journey of the Yosemite National Park. The cheeky Sophia introduces us to, the Sequoia, a redwood, coniferous tree that is breathtaking to nature lovers like me introduced to this tree for the first time. She journeys with Red and happily gets to ride on his mule, Jack, in her dream of finding treasure. Meanwhile, she stops and observes trees, plants, flowers, and insects. Red acts as her tour guide, while Jack is quite silent on the journey and leaves all the chatter to Red and Sophia.

Red and Sophia view “majestic waterfalls” and “soaring canyons” while he recants to her the story of John Muir and his encounters with the indigenous people. This wonderful picture book proves ideal reading for children as well as persons of all ages who enjoy reading. The narrative is captivating, while the language is crisp and catchy. The language is designed to capture children’s attention and their imagination. The book’s picture illustrations are eye-catching and grow increasingly complex, and intriguing. The narrative engenders a passion for the glorious wilderness and the indigenous people that once inhabited its sacred space.

1. **Review by Lisa Lickel, Wisconsin Writers Association Book Review (appearing March, 2022)**

In the latest adventure by former elementary teacher Curt Casetta, the young Sophia learns a thoughtful lesson outwardly about appreciating nature, and inwardly about respecting what’s important to others.

Sophia reluctantly accompanies her grandmother on what seems like an utterly boring lecture by some nature nut about pine trees. But Sophia’s about to go on a magical adventure of her own with a very special guide.

“Just call me Red,” says a mysterious old man who appears next to a complaining Sophia. Grandma parked her under a hundred-year-old dying pine tree, which Sophia cannot find in the least bit interesting.

But it’s not just any old pine tree, Red tells Sophia, and reminds her of its name: sequoia.

Red invites Sophia to learn about the man who wanted to save nature, John Muir, by going on a ramble to experience what Muir did when he first came to California. Best yet, Red has a mule, not a donkey, he invites Sophia to ride, and they’re going to look for treasure. The two of them explore and learn about the land before white settlers arrived. Much to Sophia’s chagrin, she learns that the white settlers not only moved in and took over lands already occupied by original native settlers, the whites didn’t treat the natives very well. Sophia is concerned as Red’s health declines during their travels.

Sophia’s revelation of the real treasure will delight readers.

As Casetta says in his author’s note, read the foreword and the afterword for additional information to interpret this tale. The book is illustrated through digitally altered photographs and vectored characterization. Although the reading level is upper second grade according to a couple of different evaluating tools, inexperienced readers will need help with harder words and the allegorical concepts. Thoughtfully annotated and including a long bibliography, Sophia Discovers the Real Treasure will surely become a favorite with the young people in your life.