

BOOK REVIEW: *Braids*

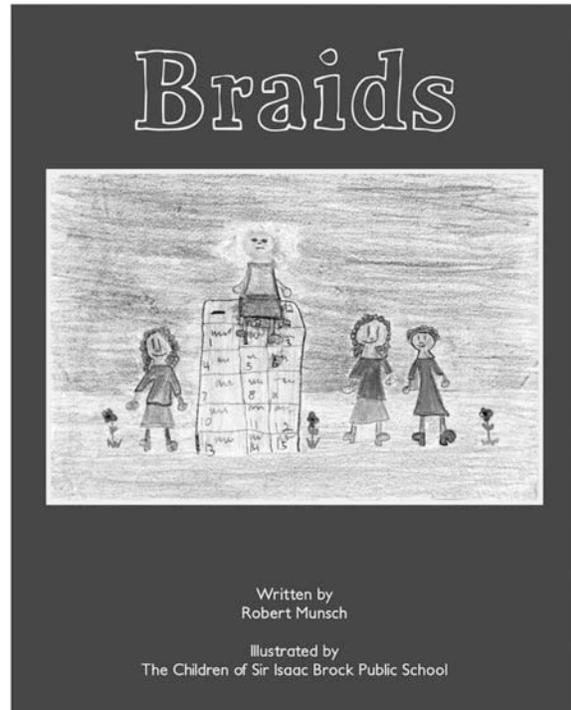
Review by Cindy Newton, 2009

Author: Robert Munsch

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It isn't easy to sit still when you'd rather be playing. It's especially difficult to sit still when your mother wants to put your hair into a million braids. This is Ashley's predicament.

She is the protagonist of *Braids*, a story by popular children's author Robert Munsch, published by 8-year-old Taya Kendall. Taya, a student at Sir Isaac Brock Public School in Guelph, has taken this project several steps forward from her initial plan to print the story in her school newspaper (of which she is also founder and editor). Robert Munsch gave *Braids* to Taya after meeting her at the Guelph Public Library in January, 2009. She eventually sought his permission to publish the story as a book to raise funds for *Children of Bukati*, a charity supported by her school. Encouraged by her parents and the school, Taya recruited fellow students to draw the illustrations, and *Braids* made its debut in June.

The story is short and lively, with many of the familiar elements of a Munsch tale: an everyday situation gets out of hand, a plucky child must solve a problem, and adults don't appreciate the child's point of view at first, but have the potential to come round. The inter-generational aspect of the story will hold particular appeal for children.

Munsch gleefully plays with rhythm, repetition and exaggeration. He is known to create stories by improvising for an audience and, perhaps for this reason, *Braids* is great fun to read aloud. What truly makes this book unique though is the collaboration between author and publisher, and the commitment students at Sir Isaac Brock have made to help students at Bukati Primary School, located in the town of Butula, West Kenya.

Children of Bukati is a charity established by Veterinarian and University of Guelph professor Dr. Cate Dewey. During her travels to Western Kenya for research in 2006, she observed that many children in the Butula area were unable to attend school because their guardians could not afford sufficient food, let alone school supplies. Almost half of the children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Donations are used to purchase school uniforms, pencils, pens and fund a lunch program for more than 500 children. More information about the charity is available at <http://www.childrenofbukati.com>.

Since its release, Taya Kendall has busily promoted *Braids* through media interviews, readings and book signs. A run of 5,000 copies was printed and all proceeds after costs go to support *Children of Bukati*, raising nearly \$35,000 for the charity. The book is available locally at The Downtown Bookstore and The Ginger Press Bookstore, and can also be ordered online at <http://shop.newint.org/can/books/braids.html>. *Braids* is a welcome addition to anyone's collection of Robert Munsch stories, and an inspiring example of how acts of generosity can have far reaching effects.



~ Special thanks to Rebecca Kendall for providing research tips and supplying images.
~ Kendall family photography by TurksHead Photography