

Book Reviews

Powder Monkey

by Donna M. McDine

Title: *Powder Monkey*

Written by: Donna McDine

Illustrated by: K.C. Snider

Ages: 8-12

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Written by award winning children's author Donna McDine, "Powder Monkey" is a thumbnail sketch of the impressment experience of 12-year-old Tommy Kitt who was taken by force with his older brother from his parents' farm by a Royal Navy press gang to serve as a powder monkey and ship boy in a battleship at sea. Enduring beatings, dangerous living conditions, and demanding physical tasks, Tommy witnessed many brutalities including the death by drowning of his brother. But he survived to become an able seaman, never seeing his father and mother again. The fast moving action, bewildering immediacy, and vivid descriptions and illustrations make "Powder Monkey" an intense time travel experience for middle grade readers.

~ Reviewed by Midwest Book Review, Children's Bookwatch, The Fiction Shelf

http://www.midwestbookreview.com/cbw/sep_14.htm#EasyReader

Powder Monkey by Donna M. McDine tells the story of 12-year-old Tommy Kitt. He is captured and forced to be a seaman by the Royal Navy Press Gang, which has also taken his older brother James and other young boys in his village. Life at sea is rough, yet Tommy determines to survive even though he may never return to his parents again.

When it comes to books for children, the illustrations are just as important as the story itself. Worthy praise goes to illustrator K.C. Snider for the beautiful and nostalgic style of illustrations. The title itself is another attention grabber. I am always interested in history, and the life of young sailor boys in the Royal Navy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries fascinates me. Tommy Kitt and the other boys' hard lives at sea are described with such realism and accuracy of what these boys had to endure working for the Royal Navy during this harsh era. The action scenes are vividly portrayed, and the pacing of the story is superb. My only complaint is

that the story is a bit short.

Nevertheless, Donna M. McDine's ability as an excellent storyteller is undeniable. Also, it is a story that presents historical facts in an interesting and compelling way. My nephew and I would love to know what fate has in store for Tommy the 'powder monkey'. All in all, an excellent read that appeals both to young and adult readers.

~ Reviewed by Lit Amri for Readers' Favorite Five Star Review ~

<http://readersfavorite.com/book-review/12252>

Powder Monkey is a story about 12 year old Tommy, who is tragically separated from his parents and thrown into a miserable life at sea by the Royal Navy Press Gangs. Although conditions are abysmal, Tommy realizes that wallowing in self-pity is not an option. His very survival depends on utmost courage. While delivering powder to the canons, enduring hardship, and fighting to stay alive, Tommy does not have time for sorrow.

Award-winning author, Donna McDine's vivid depiction of Tommy's situation puts the reader in the center of the action. K.C. Snider's powerful illustrations further bring the story and Tommy's struggles to life. I highly recommend this book!

~ Reviewed by Stacey Marshall, author of *Captain Courage and the Fear-Squishing Shoes* ~ CaptainCourage.com

This is a story about a boy named Tommy who lives on a farm with his family. Disaster strikes one day, and him and his brother find themselves shackled on a ship with many other young boys. They are made to work and fight battles that are not theirs to care about. They suffer abuse at the hands scallywags and scruffy men of the sea.

Powder Monkey will keep you turning the page, as what comes next is always more devastating than the last. The young boys suffer excruciating treatments, and some are bound to not make it. The ship becomes home and a young boy who totes black powder bags for battle becomes a..... Find out what happens to Tommy and his brother.

This is not a book for those who wish for a happy ending, but a true grit story about the survival of the fittest. It's a well-written book by Donna McDine, with brilliant illustrations by K.C. Snider. I give this book five ***** stars.

~ Reviewed by Susan Hornbach, author of children's literature ~ www.susanhornbach.com/
& www.bagfullofbooks4kids.blogspot.com/

Right away the title intrigued me. The richly detailed illustrations, by well known artist and illustrator K.C Snider, drew me back into a time when the theme of this historical novel would have been played out – press gangs kidnapping young boys for service at sea. This tale of 14-

year-old farm boy Tommy, and his older brother, is well told. It has the right feel. The author's research shines through on every page. Action scenes, and well-crafted tense moments pulled me into the story, and the ending was true to life in those times.

This is a book that boys and tomboys will enjoy. Teachers and home schooling parents will appreciate its authentic background and vivid details: an exciting and action packed read. I recommend *Powder Monkey* as a book that will definitely HOOK Kids on Reading.

~Reviewed by Margot Finke, children's author ~ <http://margotfinke.com/>

It is a rare to find a book for children, that depicts a fact or two from history yet is told in the form of a story that grabs a reader from the very first page. *Powder Monkey* is one of those delightful finds in literature that combines a touch of history with a fictional character and keeps the reader on the edge of their seat and turning the page.

Tommy, the main character, is the favorite from the very first incident showing his true character when he tries to protect his mother. The reader can't help but wonder what terrible trials will follow the poor boy as he sputter from the hay mount in an attempt to defend his family.

Author Donna M. McDine does a wonderful job with sensory details allowing the reader to experience the use of all five senses as Tommy is taken aboard a sea vessel and becomes a virtual slave to the men on board. Readers will smell the stench of body fluids and salt from the sea, feel the rocking of the ship, and experience firsthand the responsibility of a powder monkey as the young lad brings gun powder to help the seaman fight other vessels on the rocky ocean.

Tommy sees and experiences more than a young boy should yet his strong character helps him to grow into a proper seaman. The reader cannot help but to feel the pain of a lost childhood and to care deeply for the man Tommy has become making the ending to the story thought provoking and life changing, even in a small way. Kudos to Ms. McDine for doing what all authors strive to do and that is to make a difference for the reader.

~Reviewed by Terri Forehand, author ~ <http://terri-forehand.blogspot.com/2013/09/book-review-powder-monkey-by-donna-m.html>

Powder Monkey by Donna McDine, illustrated by K.C. Snider, is strong historical fiction. It tells a story of a harsh period in British naval history that is not for the faint of heart. Two brothers are taken by the Royal Navy Press Gang and impressed into service aboard a warship. These boys, aged twelve and fourteen, are destined to run powder to the cannons during battles at sea.

Tommy, the younger brother, is witness to the brutality of the press gang against his parents, who try to save their boys. He sees other boys, his neighbors, also taken into service. These farm boys have to learn to survive as servants of the crown, at the beck and call of the sailors they serve. These "powder monkeys" experience violence, and must perform the vilest duties aboard ship.

K.C. Snider's artwork captures the agony and horror suffered by those boys at that time in history. The haunting images she creates take us back to that awful period. We see the smoke, the filth, and the danger in these boys' lives. It's a wonder any of them lived through such an awful experience.

Tommy's will to survive, overcomes his terrible circumstances, his pain, and his losses. He learns what he needs to do and does it. Although he never sees his parents again, he does become an able bodied seaman, and that's as close to a happy ending as we get in this story.

There is a lot to discuss here with students, especially those who might want to complain about their situation now. All they need to do is look at what happened to those boys back then. History lessons can be hard to hear – and harder to learn -- but these stories must be told.

~ Reviewed by Penelope Anne Cole, Award-winning Children's Author ~

<http://penelopeannecole.blogspot.com/2013/09/powder-monkey-by-donna-mcdine.html>

Ladies and Gentlemen, the award winning children's author Donna M. McDine is back! This time she has two books to offer. I will be posting reviews for both of her new books. This review is about *Powder Monkey*.

Powder Monkey takes you back to that dark era of history when the Royal Press gang used to kidnap young boys from their homes and turn them forcibly into sailors and their powder boys.

This story is about a twelve-year-old boy Tommy, who along with his brother and some other boys is kidnapped from his home. He and the other boys are taken aboard a large ship where they become the minions of the crew. The boys are subjected to brutality. One day their ship is attacked at high sea and Tommy becomes the powder boy for the gang and in process loses his ability to hear. What happens to Tommy after the gun battle is over? What about his elder brother and his parents Is he reunited with his family? Does the book have a happy ending? Do read on.

It is a compelling book, despite it being a children's book I was forced to turn the pages and finish the story as quickly I could read.

The first time I read the story it left me with goose bumps. This book brings out the harsh reality faced by the young boys of those times to light. Though the story is fiction, woven around the facts of those dark days, it still brought tears to my eyes.

Donna M. McDine has done a wonderful job again along with the illustrator K.C. Snider whose illustrations are vivid.

Parents, if you want your children to know a little about history and the harsh reality of life of the days gone by than this book comes highly recommended.

~ Reviewed by Zealot Readers ~ <http://zealotreaders.blogspot.com/2013/09/powder-monkey-by-donna-m-mcdine.html>

This is a historical picture book for kids 8 and up about the Royal Navy Press Gangs. It is a book which will educate kids and also inspire them by showing how much easier their life is today than it was in those difficult days when they had to be separated from family, friends, and loved ones. This book will stretch a children's imagination and educate at the same time. What a GREAT combination.

The illustrations are wonderful and the book will keep children reading the book over and over again. The book is geared mostly for boys but it can also be used for educational purposes in the classroom and also for home schooling.

Thank you Donna McDine for such a wonderful book! You are indeed a gifted children's writer.

~ Reviewed by Irene S. Roth, freelance writer and book reviewer ~
<http://rothsinspiringbooksandproducts.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/powder-monkey-book-review-for-woi-tour/>

I am a big fan of historical fiction. The work of Donna McDine piqued my interest because in her Middle Grade story *Powder Monkey* she gives us a look into a little known piece of history surrounding the forced servitude of young men aboard British Naval vessels.

It is obvious from her ability to give detailed accounts of the misery and trauma involved with this period of time, McDine is a talented writer. Ms. McDine shows the experiences of her characters in great detail while staying historically accurate.

She picks pivotal moments in these young boys lives, letting us peer into the horror of their experiences.

This historical period is fascinating to me and I would like to see more from McDine about the trials of Tommy, her main character.

Forced into a life at sea by the Royal Navy Press Gangs, 12-year-old Tommy Kitt finds himself in a floating sea of misery. Poor living conditions and beatings occur daily. Despite his small size, Tommy must summon the courage and physical ability to prevail in a situation he cannot escape.

You can find the spell bounding ride of stories by award-winning children's author, Donna McDine through her publisher-Guardian Angel publishing.

~ Reviewed by Traci McDonald, writer and book reviewer ~
<http://tracimcdonald.blogspot.com/2013/09/author-review-donna-mcdine.html>

Powder Monkey by Donna McDine, illustrated by K.C. Snider, is a heart wrenching historical fiction. The story chronicles the lives of two brothers during British naval history. The brothers are taken and forced to run powder to the cannons during battles at sea. No child should have to endure such cruel ordeal. At the age of twelve and fourteen, the two brothers should have been allowed to attend school, not be servants to sailors.

I was so encouraged by Tommy's will to make the best of his situation. He could have easily given up. He never sees his parents again, but Tommy refuses to let his situation define who he becomes.

As I read the story, I thought about the lessons young children today can learn from Tommy's situation. The two words that come to mind are perseverance and thankfulness.

The technical age we now live in encourages children to go after instant gratification. I see this in my classroom all the time.

Students are not willing to put in the work in order to do well. It is a good thing to teach children early on the value of not giving up and to be thankful for the child labor laws that protect them.

K.C. Snider's artwork transports the reader back to a world where innocent boys endured many hardships. Parents and teachers can certainly use the book to teach many valuable lessons about life and how it should not be taken for granted.

~Reviewed by Nicole Weaver, Award-winning Children's Author ~

<http://mysisterismybestfriend.blogspot.com/2013/11/book-review-powder-monkey-by-donna.html>

Powder Monkey is a picture books in that it has wonderful illustrations, but are recommended for ages 8-12, so they have more text than traditional picture books. Donna has written a thoughtful book that will encourage reluctant readers to WANT to read. *Powder Monkey* tells the story of a young boy taken against his will and pressed into service on board a ship by the Royal Navy press gang. It's not a happy-go-lucky tale, but is a page-turner that boys especially will love.

~ Reviewed by Sharon Stanley, children's author ~

<http://www.farmandfrufu.blogspot.com/2013/11/a-recommendation.html>

Powder Monkey was my favorite of the two, only because I do like hockey. *Powder Monkey* told the story of a child forced to be a sailor. So many children in history were forced into slavery. This book tells the story in such a way that it made me sad, especially for Tommy's parents. However it is a perfect introduction to young kids about slavery, and being a sailor. The pictures are great and this book could be perfect to use for a thematic unit. 5/5.

~ Reviewed by Deal Sharing Aunt ~ <http://dealsharingaunt.blogspot.com/2013/12/donna-mcdine-reviews-and-trailers.html>

A story of endurance, survival and hardship, *Powder Monkey* pretty much left me breathless. This 24-page-long historical fiction for children made a huge emotional impact on me - even bigger than some of the adults novel I've read this year. I will be reeling from it for a very long time.

It's a sad and heart-wrenching tale about a boy, little Tommy, who is brutally ripped away from his parents and, together with his older brother and a group of other children, forced by the Royal Navy Press Gangs into a miserable life on board of a ship. Robbed of his childhood, lonely, scared and often times starved, Tommy has to obediently follow the rules and do whatever the seamen order him to do, including scrubbing toilets and cleaning the manger of the live stock. Or, in case of a battle, fetching the bags with gunpowder. He's terrified to the point he's physically ill, but he's smart and determined to stay alive.

This is a bleak and emotionally gutting tale, perhaps a bit too mature and depressing for young children, though I do believe that between happy and fluffy stories, every child should also find time for this powerful and affecting tale. It will expand their worldview and teach them about history. It will also make for a fabulous lesson about courage, hope and enduring hardships. I would, however, recommended this for a slightly older audience - closer to the age of 12 perhaps - and not, as suggested for readers ages 8 and up.

Ultimately, *Powder Monkey* is a very moving and important story that carries a huge emotional load and some interesting life lessons. It's very sad and riveting, but it ends on a hopeful note, which makes it a great addition to your child's collection.

~ Reviewed by Evie Seo ~ Amazon Top 1000 Reviewer

I really enjoyed *Powder Monkey* by Donna M. McDine. I had never heard of the "powder monkey" before and used this book as an incentive to do some research about what they actually did. Just like the story, young children were often taken from their parents homes and sent to sea to perform these terrifying and very dangerous jobs. We see the terrifying conditions through the experience of Tommy Kitt who is also taken from his home and sent to sea to become a powder monkey. Tommy's experience is very scary but portrays a very convincing journey about the life of these young people. I enjoyed this story but I did find it to be a little dark. The age recommendation is 8-12 any younger would not be appropriate. The illustrations were very well done and helped reinforce the story. Overall, I enjoyed and recommend this book. – 4 Stars

~ Reviewed by Diana Silva ~ Book Nerd ~

<http://booknerdloleotodo.blogspot.com/2014/09/powder-monkey-by-donna-m-mcdine.html>

This is not the first book that I've read by author Donna McDine. Her creativeness to storylines is truly impressive. This little book is packed with lots of details and action, however I'm not sure of the appropriateness of the younger age. I gave the book to my 10-year-old son to read and

when I was ready to have a discussion about what he liked or disliked, he said he liked the illustrations. Upon reading the story, I now know why he didn't elaborate much. There are a few events in the story that would need some more clarification in explaining the context. Some word choices are also very upper level. Tommy's story of being captured and working at sea as a young boy is an interesting and fast historical read.

~ Reviewed by Deitre ~ A Leisure Moment

<http://www.aisuremoment.com/2014/09/04/blog-tour-review-powder-monkey-by-donna-medine>

I read both Powder Monkey and The Golden Pathway (another book by this author/illustrator pair which I will be reviewing tomorrow) along with my 9 year-old son. At first glance he thought it was going to be an easy read but we were both pleasantly surprised by the depth of the story and the vocabulary used. Finding a book to keep my son's attention can be tricky but Powder Monkey was action-packed from page one and presented a realistic and vibrant account of what a young boy living in Tommy's times and circumstances could have gone through without sugar-coating it. The story had my son asking many follow up questions as we turned the pages ("Why would someone kidnap these boys and make them work so hard on a boat?", "Was Tommy a real person?") which allowed us to discuss these situations that he had never heard about before. I asked my son if he was happy he didn't live in a time when someone could simply come and take children away from their parents and make them work so hard without having any way getting away and I was presented with a resounding "Um, Yeah!".

While my son wasn't as captivated by the illustrations as he was by the story I thought the pictures were beautiful. Every other page was a full-page illustration and helped visually advance the storyline. The pictures of the turbulent and unpredictable open sea were my favorite!

Overall, Powder Monkey was a very exhilarating if sad story that my son seemed to very much enjoy and had him thinking what he would do in the same situation. While the story made him sad (he seemed genuinely upset at the idea that Tommy and the other boys wouldn't be able to see their parents again) it opened up a discussion on the history behind boys forced into this sort of work and how different our lives are today. We read it in one sitting which, when dealing with my son's short attention span, is always an accomplishment in itself!

So What Did I Think Of The Cover?:

I love it, as I do with all the illustrations within. It captures the general idea of the story and gives the reader a visual of this young boy forced into a life he doesn't want.

My Rating: 4.0/5.0

~ Reviewed by Colleen Turner ~ Historical Tapestry

<http://historicaltapestry.blogspot.com/2014/09/powder-monkey-blog-tour-review.html>

My second book by Donna McDine is another enjoyable one. It appears that she has connected with her targeted age range here (8-12 year olds) with another look at the past. The illustrations are wonderful and really bring this book to life. Though the book does not mention where it is taking place or the time period it was still interesting. Dark at times, it might frighten younger readers.

I had never heard of the Royal Navy Press Ganges before or the term Powder Monkey, so this reader got a history lesson. Tommy is only 12 years when taken by force from his family, he is scared, smart but also determined that he will survive. I read this book in one sitting and would have liked the ending to have gone on a little longer. It ended rather abruptly and it would have been nice to see what happened to Tommy. I guess that is a sign that the author created a bond with her readers.

In a classroom setting or with parent/child reading it could open a door to questions and bringing history to life.

~ Reviewed by Margaret ~ Just One More Chapter ~

<http://www.justonemorechapter.com/2014/09/powder-monkey-by-donna-mcdine-book-tour.html>

Powder Monkey is the second book by Donna McDine that has taken me on a journey to the past. This 23-page book for young readers packs an emotional punch that holds you in its grip from the first word to the last and the beautiful illustrations by K.C. Snider really bring the story to life.

Twelve-year-old Tommy Kitt and his older brother are forcibly taken from their parents and the only life they've ever known by the Royal Navy Press Gangs and forced into hard labour on a ship at sea. Tommy is understandably overwhelmed and scared and that feeling is only reinforced by the often harsh treatment of the young boys. Tommy learns quickly though that the best way to stay out of trouble is to do your work without complaint. For Tommy his days consist of cleaning toilets and the mangers below deck where he most likes to be as it is peaceful. However they also have to train for battle and finally that day comes and Tommy follows his role as a powder monkey running back and forth to bring gun powder to the sailors. Most certainly this isn't the life Tommy wants but he's determined to stay alive and do that he knows he has to follow the rules.

Powder Monkey may be short but it tells such a poignant story in those few pages. I felt Tommy's fear and hopelessness and also his hope at a better future down the line. The book is recommended for 8-12 year old kids but I think I'd put it towards the 12 year age range only because it is more of a dark tale and maybe a harder read for the younger ones. Yet at the same time it's important for young children to learn about history and how much different life was for some kids in times past. For me it was enlightening, as I'd never heard of the Royal Navy Press

Gangs or the term powder monkey so I was able to learn something that led me to wanting to know more.

Once again Donna McDine highlights a time in history with the Royal Navy Press Gangs and how children were affected by it. A recommended read for parents and children that could lead to some really important discussions and life lessons.

~ **Reviewed by Darlene ~ Peeking Between the Pages ~**

<http://www.peekingbetweenthepages.com/2014/09/powder-monkey-by-donna-mcdine-giveaway-us-print-intl-ebook.html>