

Kyi, Tanya L. *Seeing Red: The True Story of Blood*. Illus. Steve Rolston. Toronto: Annick Press, 2012. Print.

*Seeing Red* is an informative, humorous, gory, and decidedly irreverent treatment of a subject close to all of our hearts. Canadian author Tanya Lloyd Kyi is best known for the *50 Questions* series for young readers, featuring topics as diverse as fire, poison and underwear. The very clever illustrations, by award-winning comic and graphic novel artist Steve Rolston, are presented in shades of black, grey, and (naturally) blood red.

The main narrative provides a fascinating overview of the red stuff, human and otherwise, and the central role it has played in history, culture, and science. Alongside the text in each chapter, the reader is treated to a comic book featuring (in a nod to Bram Stoker) a boy named Harker who keeps a notebook of his blood-filled adventures as he finds himself at the centre of the topic under discussion. And throughout, the author provides a wealth of related trivia and factoids using insets on subtle background graphics of red blood cells and band aids.

Individual chapters focus on ritual and religion, coming of age, food and drink, family ties and genetics, medicine and forensics, and the human fascination with violence. And while not following a strict chronology, the author clearly demonstrates how human understanding of this vital fluid has developed throughout history.

The chapter *Rites of Passage* should be of particular interest to pre-teens, with its graphic descriptions of how various cultures have developed painful and bloody initiation rituals to mark a boy's transition to adulthood, and of the wide range of celebrations and taboos surrounding a girl's first menstrual period.

The ever-popular vampire is featured no more prominently than any other topic in the text, with only a couple of sections in the chapter *Sips and Suppers* that discusses the utility of blood in all manner of drinking and dining. But the introduction of a cute young female vampire to Harker's story midway through the book will no doubt appease any disappointed *Twilight* fans.

Pop culture references abound, and the author's black humour skewers major religions and historical figures alike. A discussion of hemophilia features an illustration of Queen Victoria handing a jumbo pack of bandages to her daughter with the words "Don't forget your dowry dear." There's no lack of gory detail in this book, from Aztec priests ripping beating hearts from the chests of their captives, to classifications of blood spatter velocities and how they correspond to different levels of violent injury.

This book would be a great addition to any public or school library. Each chapter ends with a few questions from Harker's notebook that may provide some interesting starting points for classroom discussion: "Is it okay to sacrifice animals for religious reasons? How is that different than killing for meat, or hunting for sport?" The reader is provided with a list of titles for further

reading, and a selected bibliography. And with its fairly in-depth indexing, *Seeing Red* provides a handy reference to a lot of bloody information.

Highly recommended: 4 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Elizabeth Wallace