

Barb's BookSpot: Episode 17
Making History Personal
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THE SECRET PROJECT. Text copyright © 2017 by Jonah Winter. Illustrations © 2017 by Jeanette Winter. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Beach Lane Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, NY.

In a simple, elegant format, *The Secret Project* relates the story of the creation of the atomic bomb, from the appropriation of land to build the research facility at Los Alamos, NM to the actual first testing within the White Sands Missile Range – the “Trinity” site. Illustrations and narration follow a simple timeline, alternating between views of what life outside the facility looked like, juxtaposed with what those inside were doing, thinking and feeling. Perhaps the project was secret and unknown to most Americans, but what of the indigenous peoples and local residents in New Mexico? Pueblo and Hopi Indians resided in these lands, an elite school for boys was suddenly closed, wildlife artists and residents knew something was happening. How did these people feel about what was going on? What repercussions and effects remain? Can radiation ever be far away – can any place be remote enough? Our hindsight as to the effects of atomic power is very different than the understanding of those just discovering it. Although the book does not delve deeply into any of these questions, reading will provoke thought and inspire inquiry into this time in our history. End matter includes an author’s note relating actual events and a list of resources for further research and information.

TRUDY'S BIG SWIM: HOW GERTRUDE EDERLE SWAM THE ENGLISH CHANNEL AND TOOK THE WORLD BY STORM. Text copyright © 2017 by Sue Macy. Illustrations copyright © 2017 by Matt Collins. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Holiday House, New York, NY.

It was 1926 Gertrude Ederle made her historic swim across the English Channel. No woman had ever accomplished this, and “Trudy” was only 19 years old. This book celebrates her as an extraordinary and determined woman, as it also highlights her remarkable achievement. Water and rough seas are beautifully depicted with lush, varied tones and dizzying angles which almost make the reader feel submerged alongside the swimmer. This might be a great book to inspire inquiry and discussion about the culture and changes which occurred during the “Roaring 20’s”. It is interesting and inspiring to consider the feat of one woman in the context of her own time, and then re-consider her achievements in comparison with females in our own time. Picture book biographies such as this help make historical figures come alive, providing a window in the life and times of one who has gone before us, and they give context as we help students to understand history by making it real.

