

Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal

Margarita Engle. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 272pp. Trade ISBN 978- 0-544-10941-4.

Grade Level: 7 and up

Silver People, an eye-opening work of historical fiction by Margarita Engle, shares the stories of the Panama Canal that are often forgotten in history: the stories of the people who built the canal, the locals, and the plants and animals in the jungle. Told in free verse poetry, the stories of "Silver People" like Mateo and Henry enlighten the reader on the terrible and often dangerous working and living conditions of those building the Canal. The story of Anita, a young girl from Panama shows the impacts of the Canal on the people of Panama and their economy. Engle even takes the reader one step further in understanding all of the stories of the Panama Canal by including not only human stories, but also the stories of the animals and the trees in the jungle to show the devastating environmental impacts of the project. *Silver People* brings light to forgotten history that will leave students wondering what other stories in history have been left out.

Young Adult readers of *Silver People* will hardly realize how much they are learning about history and geography because of Engle's characters that draw strong emotional connections. Through their reading of the different layered stories, students will learn about geographic themes of human-environment interaction and movement from many different perspectives. The different characters in the story also allow students to learn about different cultures, human settlement, conflict, economics within the context of geography.

Resources:

1. Theodore Roosevelt at the Canal

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/stereo.1s02353/>

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.36228/>

<http://minnesotabrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/febdfd28ac.jpg>

2. Panama Canal Property Map

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4872c.pcc00006/>

3. "The Kiss of the Oceans" from David Berry

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dberry/2188820510/in/photostream/lightbox/>

4. The First Ship Through the Panama Canal

<http://www.usnews.com/dims4/USNEWS/b484e8a/2147483647/thumbnail/970x647/quality/85/?url=%2Fcmsmedia%2Fbb%2F95%2F286f26f34ceea5ab66f110d00508%2Fresizes%2F1500%2F140815-panamacanal-editorial.jpg>

4. Aerial View of the Panama Canal

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4872p.ct003482/>

5. Works at the Culebra (Serpent) Cut

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b21819/>