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BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS

Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood (2001) by Oliver Sacks. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

This is a wonderful memoir of growing up in England in the 1940's and 1950's by an outstanding medical writer and MD. Sacks describes how the mentor relationship with his uncle, a chemist and entrepreneur, stimulated his desire to become a scientist. His parents, who were physicians, sent him to the safety of a private school in the country during the German bombing of London (World War II -- Battle of Britain). This was a traumatic experience for a young boy separated from a loving and deeply religious Orthodox Jewish family. Unfortunately, he was seriously mistreated by the owners of this school, and suffered mentally from the hateful headmaster and school bullies. (George Orwell and Freeman Dyson have described similar experiences in English private schools.) As a six-year old, Sacks had an intense fascination with prime and Pythagorean numbers which helped him to mentally escape from the oppressive private school environment. After returning to London in the summer of 1943 at the age of ten, he began visiting his Uncle Tungsten (nicknamed after the metal) again and studying chemistry with him. In regard to this mentor relationship, he said: "Above all, I delighted in being able to visit Uncle Tungsten again – his place, at least, seemed relatively unchanged (though tungsten was now in somewhat short supply, because of the vast quantities needed for making tungsten steel for armor plating). I think he also delighted in having his young protégé back, for he would spend hours with me in his factory and his lab, answering questions as fast as I could answer them. . . ." (p. 34).

Sacks' childhood and early adolescent passions were chemistry, photography and reading. His family encouraged these passions by allowing him to set up his own chemistry and photo labs. His father served as a model for reading and the love of books. All of these interests and family culture eventually led to his becoming a neurologist and the author of several excellent books. He was particularly impressed with his father's passion for books: "My father was not given to emotion or intimacy, at least in the context, the confines, of the family. But there were certain times, precious times, when I did feel close to him. I have very early memories of seeing him reading in our library, and his concentration was such that nothing could disturb him, for everything outside the circle of his lamp was completely tuned out of his mind. For the most part he read the Bible or the Talmud, though he also had a large collection of books on Hebrew, which he spoke fluently, and Judaism – the library of a grammarian and scholar. . . ." (p. 91).

We highly recommend **Uncle Tungsten** as an instructive autobiography concerned with the development of a highly gifted individual. Additional books by one of the greatest living medical writers that gifted students should read are: (1) **The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales** (1970); (2) **Awakenings** (1973) – made into a movie of the same name in 1990, starring Robert De Niro and Robin Williams; (3) **A Leg to Stand On** (1984); and (4) **Seeing Voices** (1989).

Churchill: A Biography (2001) by Roy Jenkins. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Many biographies have been written about Winston Churchill (1874-1965), but what makes this book unique is that the author was involved in British politics for nearly 50 years as a member of Parliament and holder of various cabinet positions. He also served in the House of Commons during the period following World War II when Churchill was a member. This book is an amazing recounting of the life and difficult times of one of world history's greatest politicians and statesmen. It is a massive volume (1002 pages) that shows Churchill in all phases of his heroic life – as the son of a British aristocrat and descendent of the Duke of Marlborough, his development as a military officer at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, his work as a fearless journalist and prisoner during the Boer War in South Africa, his participation in British politics beginning in 1900 at the age of 26 years, his writing career which covered British current events and history, his active participation in managing government affairs through many high cabinet posts, and the pinnacle of his career as Prime Minister during World War II.

What is most impressive about Churchill's life is his determination to achieve greatness. Jenkins' book provides extensive documentation concerning how Churchill used each phase of his career to reach his overriding goal of making significant contributions to his nation and the world. If one individual can be identified as having saved Western society from almost certain destruction by Adolph Hitler and his Nazi barbarians, it is Winston Churchill. He bolstered England against overwhelming odds of a Nazi invasion and takeover through his rousing speeches and influence on President Franklin Roosevelt (through Harry Hopkins who was Roosevelt's aid), and the United States in the war against Nazi Germany. The second half of Jenkins' book shows how Churchill provided the leadership skills to inspire both the English and Americans to victory. Now, we have the new Nazis to deal with in the form of various terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda. Where are leaders of the caliber of Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt who can unite nations in combating these scourges?

Gifted students will find that this book provides a wealth of historical information about the life and times of one of the greatest leaders of Western democracy.

Some books by Winston Churchill that demonstrate his clear understanding of world history are: (1) **History of the English Speaking Peoples**. (1956-58). London: Cassell & Co.; and (2) **Memoirs of the Second World War: An Abridgement**. (1991). New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Re-forming Gifted Education: Matching the Program to the Child (2002) by Karen B. Rogers. Scottsdale, Arizona: Great Potential Press.

This book is a comprehensive resource for parents written by one of the best researchers in the gifted education field. Rogers gives parents detailed information on understanding giftedness and many important topics including subject-based acceleration, grade-based acceleration, program provisions, out-of-school provisions and developing the child's educational plan. The book also contains checklists parents can use to identify gifted children's learning potential and strengths, and their interests in reading/language, mathematics, science, social studies and the arts. Each chapter has a clear discussion based on current research. In addition, informative tables and relevant accounts of particular gifted children highlight the topics being discussed. We highly recommend Rogers' book for both parents and teachers who are seeking a comprehensive resource for selecting the best possible education for their gifted children or students.

New Book from Gifted Education Press: Essential Mathematics for Gifted Students: Preparation for Algebra, Grades 4 – 8 (2002) by Francis Sganga. Covers numerous topics in algebra and geometry in a stimulating format. Answer sections occur throughout the book. 8 8 8

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94): Master of the Gifted Imagination by Michael E. Walters
Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

Although gifted individuals may display their talents later in life (e.g., Winston Churchill and Arthur Miller), their youthful behavior can show early signs of future achievements. Robert Louis Stevenson's childhood demonstrates this fact – his literary genius did not unfold until his thirties. As both a child and adult, he was constantly suffering from debilitating respiratory illnesses that make his literary works great physical and mental accomplishments. He was a voracious reader and observer of nature, and he always jotted down notes and kept a journal. In addition, Stevenson had a constant desire to travel and experience new places – “. . . Do I not remember the time when I myself haunted the station, to watch train after train carry its complement of free men into the night, and read the names of distant places on the time-bills with indescribable longings?” (**Louis : A Life of Robert Louis Stevenson** by Philip Callow, 2001, p. 84).

Stevenson is a role model for gifted students. Despite his physical illnesses, he not only traveled, but engaged in rigorous expeditions. His early books were about physically demanding journeys he undertook for their own sake. The first book he wrote (**An Inland Voyage**, 1878) was about a canoe trip he took with a friend down the rivers of France. Another early book described his walking trip in a remote, mountainous part of France (**Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes**, 1879). In 1879, he traveled across the United States to San Francisco where he married Fanny Osbourne; they honeymooned in a cabin near the abandoned Silverado mine (Napa Valley of California). Shortly afterward, he returned to Scotland with his wife and stepson. His final years were spent sailing the South Pacific near Australia and Samoa.

Stevenson wrote four major novels. The first was **Treasure Island** (1883). It contains two of the finest characters in English literature, the adolescent Jim Hawkins and the pirate Long John Silver. The friendship between Hawkins and Silver is significant because Hawkins learns there is a decent and caring side to the pirate. In the second novel, **Kidnapped** (1886), another adolescent is interacting with an outlaw – the teenager is David Balfour, a lowland Scottish Protestant, and the outlaw is Alan Breck, a Catholic highlander and rebel. Despite their political differences, they develop a friendship similar to Mark Twain's Huck Finn and the fugitive slave named Jim. The third book is **The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde** (1886). Here, Stevenson explores how the same individual can possess rational and irrational personalities. The fourth book is **The Master of Ballantrae: A Winter's Tale** (1889). It is about two brothers engaged in a biblical Cain and Able struggle. The final scene is a duel in the snow where both brothers destroy each other.

Stevenson's style and characters reflect the issues that gifted students are concerned with: the struggle for personal freedom and the many dimensions of the human personality. Contemporary writers such as the Argentine poet and short story writer, Jorge Borges, and the Russian American writer, Vladimir Nabokov, have described Stevenson's style as being important to the tradition of English literature. Stevenson was aware that adventure was an emotional as well as a physical experience: “. . . the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek. . . .” (**Louis** by Philip Callow, 2001, p. 72).