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Blue Jay Girl. By Sylvia Ross. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2010. 48 pages. \$12.95 cloth.

In the Yokuts community, “A girl who wasn’t ordinary was much more fun than a girl who was ordinary” (2). *Blue Jay Girl* is that girl. Her story begins when she is eight “acorn seasons old” and struggling to know herself and find her path among her people. Dedicated to the children of the Tule River Indian Reservation, this short book for young readers will appeal to any reader who remembers growing up. Sylvia Ross carefully includes cultural details that strengthen and support the culture and language of the Yokuts people, but her characters, plot, and setting also serve as an introduction to the culture for readers not previously knowledgeable about the Yaudanchi, Koyeti, Wakchumni, and Yowlumni, the four tribes of the Yokuts Nation nestled in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of what is now California.

Blue Jay Girl includes a pronunciation guide and glossary of the Yaudanchi-Wakchumni words and an afterword with basic historical information for parents, teachers, and good readers. Because language is such a strong marker of cultural identity, the inclusion of these words tells us much about the people who use them. For instance, *ahntru* is a type of doctor who heals the wounded, while *kouteun* is a doctor who cares for the spirit. When *Blue Jay Girl* seeks help, she turns to both types of healers for a holistic solution to her problem. On a less serious note, the name *Blue Jay Girl* gives to her dog reveals the humor of the language. His name, Kiyu, actually means “wolf,” which shows how important it is to understand the nuances and wordplay of a community. The inclusion of the indigenous language more than makes up for the few redundancies in the English text.

Like *Lion Singer* (2005), Ross’s earlier book about a Chukchansi boy and his family, *Blue Jay Girl* centers on the simple dilemma of a child. In this case, *Blue Jay Girl* is forced to face the fact that her friends won’t play with her because their parents have decided her “adventurous nature” is too dangerous. The story moves forward as one might expect, with the young girl asking for help from those around her. This is the story of a girl, but it is also about a community that values the role of elders, a place where parents are not perfect but are engaged and aware of their children’s concerns. In a short scene that illustrates the level of honesty and trust between a mother and daughter, *Blue Jay Girl* talks about her problem and insists, “I’m not dangerous.” Her mother replies calmly, with unconditional love, “Yes, you are” and offers the example of the way a bold blue jay is different from a careful quail (6). Her mother encourages her to ask others for advice, assures her “you are a beautiful child,” and makes a necklace of blue jay feathers, berries, and pine pitch to remind her to think about who she is.

Through artifacts brought to life and described in context, readers learn which parts of the world the Tule people carry. The necklace of blue jay feathers serves as a connection and reminder of her mother's metaphor. Blue Jay Girl also carries stones to mark the years of her life. When Blue Jay Girl visits the healers, even she begins to see these pieces and parts of her world differently. She learns that it is the people who hold the power and knowledge of a culture, not the things. "The skulls were just skulls. The lion just looked like an old skin. Without the mask, Opodo Kouteaun looked like her grandfather. He wasn't even a little scary" (29). This is a lesson many museums still struggle to learn.

Another valuable lesson found in *Blue Jay Girl* stems from her reflection on her past. Although she is only eight, she can identify "the very worst thing" ever to happen in her life, which was when her friend Small Ants Crawling followed her up a tree without thinking and then fell and broke her arm. This incident teaches her that she needs to think ahead and consider the lives of others. It also taught her that a fall can happen in an instant but healing is a long process. This message is reinforced when Blue Jay Girl visits the healers saying, "I have come to ask if you could help me change my nature. I don't want to be dangerous anymore" (25). They have no easy instant answers and tell her, "Everything is what it is. Rabbit runs on the ground and fish swims in the water" (27). At first, she dares to argue that she is only asking for a slight change, as in the difference between two birds. But the healers decide to sing together to find an answer. It is wonderful to see a man and a woman in this book working together as equals to heal a young girl: no "surgeon" and "nurse," but simply two voices blended. It is also amazing to see that the resource they turn to is song. Just as doctors now might seek a copy of *The Physicians' Desk Reference* to know what medicine is needed, the old woman Idik Mukec and the man Opodo Kouteaun seek answers a different way. Kouteaun says, "Let me sing. I will sing and find an answer to the question of birds and natures" (25). Their song erases her worry and sadness and leads to a recommendation that leaves the outcome in her hands. The answer from the spirit world is very personal and meant specifically for her. She is told, "You must teach yourself to move slowly and think carefully" (27). She is asked to look ahead and to think of others in order to recognize what is dangerous. She is also told that she should become an apprentice to their work of healing.

The elders determine that this dangerous girl is just what they need and give her a chance to find her own set of skills and to focus on working toward her full potential. This offers a contrast to today's system of public education, which seeks to give all students the same measurable proficiency in a range of delimited areas. Saving that larger debate for another venue, it is sufficient to say that books like this one, which offer alternate social systems, provide

diverse and interdisciplinary ways to think about a variety of topics. Blue Jay Girl is warned, "It will take a long time for the Yaudanchi people to see that your nature has changed. You must be patient." In a world of fast food and instant gratification, this is a message worthy of all readers.

Eventually, Blue Jay Girl modifies her behavior and accepts her nature. The story ends with a postscript telling how she became a well-known healer and turned her adventurous ways into travels in each of the four directions, sometimes far from where she grew up. Yet, "however far she went she always returned to Pawhawwuh Tin, her home and original community." Blue Jay Girl took and learned to give some fine advice: "Keep your own spirit. It is a good one" (31).

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The California Missions Source Book: Key Information, Dramatic Images, and Fascinating Anecdotes Covering All 21 Missions. By David J. McLaughlin with Rubén Mendoza. Scottsdale, AZ: Pentacle Press, 2009. 68 pages. \$24.95 paper.

David McLaughlin and Rubén Mendoza have produced a remarkably travel-friendly book about the California missions. With an introductory historical overview, the book features individual profiles of each mission that are designed as site guides. Aimed at a popular audience, the book succeeds in presenting salient and interesting facts about each mission in an attractive and accessible format. Small enough for traveling, it is printed on heavy-duty glossy paper made to withstand dirty fingers and road dust, unavoidable on a trip up and down the Camino Real. The spiral binding also allows the pages to be folded back, a thoughtful feature handy for using the "Key Facts" pages while visiting a mission.

The first four pages offer the credentials of the authors—McLaughlin, an established travel writer and photographer, and Mendoza, an archaeologist and mission scholar—along with discussions about why and how the book was written. The summary history recounts the Spanish settlement and development of Alta California including exploratory expeditions, problems of financing and supply, the politics of the religious orders, founding of presidios and missions, and the development of civilian pueblos. The concluding historical chapter is awkwardly placed at the end of the book as an afterword. Here the results of secularization are presented along with the American takeover and the eventual return of some mission properties to the Catholic Church.