

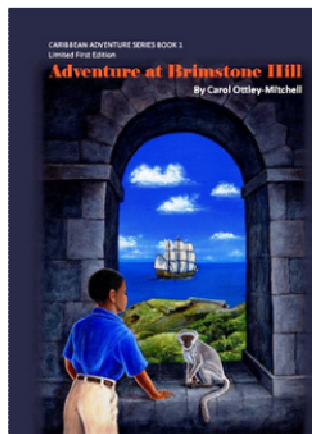
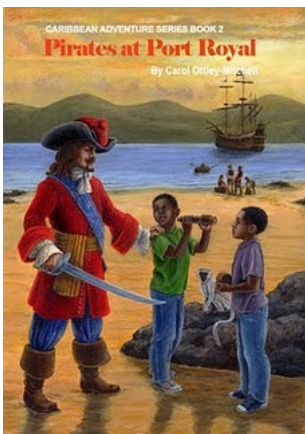


The Online Caribbean Children's Literature Magazine



Review of the Caribbean Adventure Series

by Summer Edward



Was there a General Fraser at the Brimstone Hill fortress in St. Kitts? Did the famous English privateer Admiral Sir Henry Morgan really keep prisoners at Fort Charles in Jamaica? And was there really a pirate called 'Calico Jack' cruising the Jamaica Channel in the eighteenth century? Yes, according to the first two installments in the *Caribbean Adventure Series* by Carol Ottley-Mitchell. Young readers get a chance to meet these historical figures in their element, seen through the eyes of two boys and a monkey who travel back in time.

In *Adventure to Brimstone Hill* (Book One), Mark, Ingrid and Kyle go on a class field trip to the old fortification, when Chee Chee the monkey leads Mark and Ingrid down a secret passage. The children find themselves smack in the middle of the 1782 French Invasion of St. Kitts. In the past, they meet General Prescott and the imposing General Fraser, second in command of the British fleet and leader of the garrisoned British, who accuses them of being spies. Fortunately, the children escape persecution when they volunteer to help General Prescott carry a message via whale boat to Admiral Hood aboard the British ship, the *Chesapeake*. In *Pirates at Port Royal* (Book Two), Mark and Kyle are visiting Kyle's grandparents in Jamaica when a trip to Fort Charles in Port Royal turns into another adventure in the past. When they try to help a young Venezuelan boy, Andrés, imprisoned for being a stowaway, escape the wrath of Sir Henry Morgan, they children inadvertently find themselves embroiled in the 1668 battle between Henry Morgan and the Spanish Admiral, Don Alonso, at Maracaibo.

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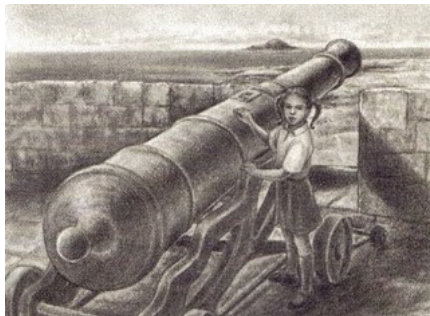
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In both books, the children eventually find their way back to the present, but not before they play an integral role in changing history. "Even if we really are in the past, everyone knows you are not supposed to change the past," says the know-it-all Ingrid at one point in *Adventure to Brimstone Hill*. Nevertheless, by warning Admiral Hood of De Grasse's strategy, the children help the British defeat the French, which of course, never really happened. Similarly, in *Pirates at Port Royal*, it is Kyle who suggests the idea of the fireship that ultimately leads to Morgan's defeat of the Spanish. Indeed, Ottley-Mitchell has crafted her stories with the creative license typical of practiced writers of historical fiction. Parents wary about a book that teaches their children the wrong version of history, will be relieved to know that the author includes a 'What's True and What's Not' section at the back of her books.

The *Caribbean Adventure Series* extends the young reader's understanding of the historical, rather than the popular, figure of the pirate. Young readers might be surprised to find that the pirates in the *Caribbean Adventure Series* are not the despicable, heartless brutes of the American *Blackbeard* stories and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* blockbuster movies. Ottley-Mitchell's pirates do not exactly come across as bloodthirsty and swashbuckling; the three children certainly don't find the pirates threatening and seem eager to help them. In fact, Ottley-Mitchell's pirates are somewhat idealized and more could have been done to acknowledge some of the faults of these historical figures.



Detail from *Adventure at Brimstone Hill*

The *Caribbean Adventure Series* is a noteworthy contribution to Caribbean children's literature if only for its cultural authenticity, evident in its attention to the authenticating details of language and everyday life in the Caribbean countries portrayed. For example, Caribbean children will recognize the "Ovaltine biscuits and guava cheese" Mark's mother packs for him to eat on the plane ride to Jamaica, and St. Kittsian children will appreciate the presence and role of vervet monkeys in the Brimstone Hill story. Also, the landscapes of St. Kitts and Jamaica are described accurately, without an iota of romanticization. Not to mention the fact that the author somehow manages to fit a Caribbean history lesson into practically every other paragraph while maintaining the natural flow of the narrative. Ann-Catherine Loo's realistic pencil illustrations are somewhat static but work well with the text and will appeal to readers transitioning from picture books to chapter books.

Finally, Ottley-Mitchell's skill as a story-teller is not to be discounted. The stories hold the reader's attention, the characters are interesting and believable, and both books present well-developed plots. As a historical fiction writer in particular, Ottley-Mitchell is in her element, seamlessly blending fact and fiction, accurately reflecting the beliefs and values of the times, and revealing an understanding of

used in both books is well-thought-out and consistent; Chee Chee the monkey seems to be the one who somehow magically opens up the portal to the past. This reviewer found the endings of both books to be slightly abrupt and the stories seem to end too quickly, but altogether, the *Caribbean Adventure Series* is a welcome addition to the rather small sample of Caribbean historical fiction for young readers.

It will be interesting to see if pirates will feature repetitively in future books in the series. It would be nice to see Ottley-Mitchell expand her range and explore other aspects of Caribbean history. Reading level: ages 9 and up!

Summer Edward is a freelance writer from Trinidad and Tobago. She is the Founder and Managing Editor of Anansesem, the ezine you're currently reading! She blogs at Summer Edward's Caribbean Children's Literature.

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