

Novel Resource for Young Hoosier Book Authors 2007-2008

The Giant Rat of Sumatra or Pirates Galore

By: Sid Fleischman

Publisher: Harper Collins

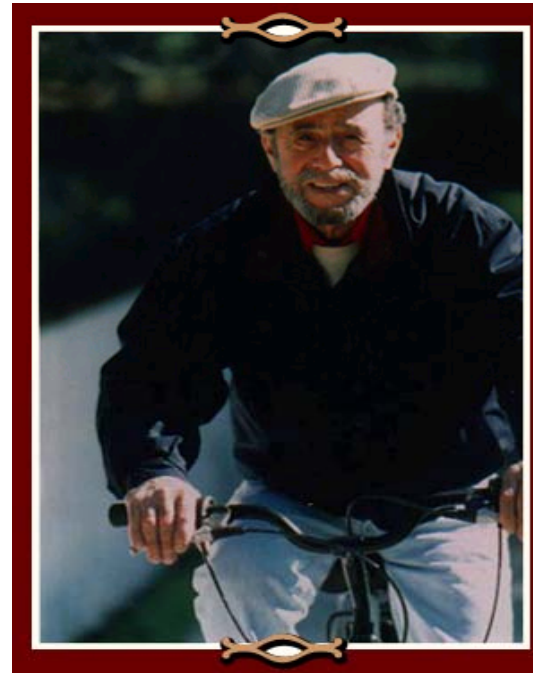
Copyright: 2005

Genre: Historical Fiction

Author Biography: www.sidfleischman.com

Contact Information: HarperCollins Children's Books
1350 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10019
webmaster@sidfleischman.com

Fleischman wrote his auto-biography *The Abracadabra Kid: A Writer's Life* in which he describes how he began his career in vaudeville and newspapers. He was born in Brooklyn, NY during the depression and grew up in San Diego. In the fifth grade he decided he wanted to grow up to be a magician. After pursuing magic he became a reporter during wartime and eventually began writing fiction.



Connection to The Giant Rat of Sumatra

This book is actually the completion of a trilogy that concerns the years surrounding the California gold rush. Because very few writers wrote about the year 1846, Fleischman asked himself why no one wrote about this period in time. Wondering if this was a good idea while researching a place to start a story his inspiration came while visiting his eye doctor. Inspired by a discussion of the giant rat of Sumatra he had with his doctor he went home and began writing. It took him ten months to complete this book.

Other books by this author:

The Whipping Boy, Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini, Disappearing Act, The Great Bandit Moon, Thirteenth Floor: A Ghost Story, By The Great Horned Spoon!, Jim Ugly, and The Midnight Horse

Annotation: A boy rescued from a shipwreck comes to be known as Shipwreck to his rescuer and provider, Captain Gallows. Shipwreck learns to balance being a boy, who can read and write, and an American aboard a pirate ship heading for Mexican land known as California. This is an adventurous tale set in 1846 at the time of the Mexican War. Shipwreck witnesses and experiences things that test his bravery, loyalty and wit. After being plucked out of the water when his stepfather's whaling boat is smashed to pieces in a storm to trying to figure out the job of a cabin boy, this twelve year old boy has much to learn. The captain befriends him and entrusts him with tales of his boyhood and how he became the captain of The Giant Rat of Sumatra. As Shipwreck longs for his home in Boston and a mother he isn't quite sure is sad he's gone, he chooses to be honest and loyal to the captain who shows him favor instead of embarking on his own way home. Captain Gallows, who has revenge in his heart, becomes a land owner in California with the goal to build a grand rancho. Not quite knowing his fate, Shipwreck follows orders and becomes a dependable guard to Captain Gallows's, who by now is known as Don Alejandro, secrets. In Don Alejandro's quest of redemption they both learn that things and people are not always as they seem. With a paltry fight by the Mexicans, the Americans capture California and this enables Shipwreck to think about Boston again. It is with great sadness he decides to venture home with an open invitation to return to Don Alejandro's El Rancho Candalaria. Sid Fleischman's entertaining writing keeps you wondering what dangerous adventure is around the corner. It is sure to entertain readers with both likable and despicable characters who make this historical novel a wonderful read.

Booktalk: "I was alive, but just barely, with nothing of my own but the shirt and breeches that had dried to my salt-crusted skin. What would happen to me?" Shipwreck, a twelve year old American, is rescued from the sea by pirates sailing a ship to Mexican ruled California. At the bow sits an imposing figure of a rat. If that doesn't make him wonder about his fate he is quickly swept up in a scheme of mutiny by one of the ship's officers. Can Shipwreck survive this dangerous adventure? Will he ever see his Boston home again?

Characters:	<u>Name and Age</u>	<u>Relationship to main and/or other characters</u>	<u>Personality traits</u>
Shipwreck	12 years old	Main character, cabin boy and confidant	Loyal, resourceful, honorable
Captain Gallows	young pirate	Captain of The Giant Rat of Sumatra	A leader driven by revenge but shows compassion to the disadvantaged and children

One-Arm Ginger	First officer	A treasure seeking, back stabbing pirate
Don Simplicio	cattle rancher	Selfish, demanding rancher who is the focus of Captain Gallows's revenge.
Senorita Wildcat/Candalaria	Bandit/Long lost love of Captain Gallows	Leader of a group of poor bandits who uses her daring steal from the rich

Conflict: While struggling both externally and internally to overcome the ocean, learning what is expected of him as a cabin boy and using his imagination to get through the next adventure, Shipwreck tumbles into danger because those around him have plans to achieve. Shipwreck's internal struggle that he experiences throughout the book is that he thinks and yearns for home and the mother who watched on the shore as he went to sea at the age of ten. Does she miss him? Does she think he is alive or dead? Would she be happy to see him again? As he ponders what to do and who to follow he pays close attention to what makes Captain Gallows a leader and grows in his understanding for his search for love.

Conflict Resolution: Shipwreck shows bravery in the face of danger and quick thinking under pressure. He remains faithful and loyal to his Captain and displays imagination and daring. More than a few times he thinks of leaving El Rancho Candalaria in search of home but the Mexican war is keeping the Americans away from California which delay his thoughts of home. In the end, he has a comfortable place to stay but how will he find the answers to his questions about his mother unless he goes home. With mixed emotions and thoughts of Captain Gallows, he sets off for home as a cabin boy aboard an American ship.

You will also love these books:

Same genre/ interest level: Marguerite DeAngeli, *The Door in the Wall* and Avi, *Man from the Sky*
 By the same author: *Half a Moon Inn* and *The Whipping Boy*

sources:

www.perma-bound.com

Bound to Stay Bound

www.lexile.com

Interest Level:

grades 5-9

MG

Reading Level:

4.5

4.5

Read-Aloud pages/passages:

Chapter and page #:

Chapter 6, pages 53 and 54

Description of action:

The mystery of the eyes of the Giant Rat of Sumatra is revealed and how the Captain will trust Shipwreck with their keep.

Chapter 18, pages 143 and 144

Captain Gallows comes face to face with the man responsible for his focus of revenge.

Setting:

The Giant Rat of Sumatra pirate ship, On Rancho Candalaria in San Diego, California in 1846

Point of view:

First Person

Theme:

A pirate adventure as the book is subtitled Pirates Galore. The main character learns through experience with deception, thievery, honesty and loyalty how to be courageous in the face of danger and that even when things seem frightening like the ferocious rat on the front of the ship he can go forward to face his fears and become stronger because of them. The meaning behind the title of this book is discovered very quickly when Fleischman describes how the ship called the Giant Rat of Sumatra comes "creaking into the harbor. After a long voyage, it was down to its last puff of wind and its last cask of fresh water." The title contains mystery and intrigue as well as reflects things to come. The reader immediately becomes involved in the adventures of the main character and his involvement with pirates.

