



Swamp Angel

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Swamp Angel can lasso a tornado, and drink an entire lake dry. She single-handedly defeats the fearsome bear known as Thundering Tarnation, wrestling him from the top of the Great Smoky Mountains to the bottom of a deep lake. Caldecott Medal-winning artist Paul O. Zelinsky's stunning folk-art paintings are the perfect match for the irony, exaggeration, and sheer good humor of this original tall tale set on the American frontier.

A Caldecott Honor Book

An ALA Notable Book

A Time magazine Best Book of the Year

A New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Book of the Year

Winner of the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award

A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

Swamp Angel Details

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Author : Anne Isaacs , Paul O. Zelinsky

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From Reader Review Swamp Angel for online ebook

Manybooks says

I am usually a huge and appreciative fan of Paul O. Zelinsky's artistry and style, but with Swamp Angel, I actually find his accompanying illustrations to Anne Isaac's presented narrative both much too over-the top for my liking and even potentially weird and disturbing in certain places (yes, the pictures are expressive, detailed, with a sense of and for both reality and imaginativeness, but especially Angelica's often exaggerated facial features leave me cold, and sorry, some of the depicted wrestling poses of Swamp Angel and Thundering Tarnation have an almost sexual feel to them, at least they do so for me). And while I definitely can see and understand how and why Zelinsky won a Caldecott Honour designation for Swamp Angel, on a purely personal and aesthetic level, his illustrations (this time) simply do not at all work for me.

Furthermore, and as I have never been all that much of a fan of North American so-called tall tales, this original and thus composed offering by Anne Isaac also never really manages to either enchant or entertain me. For as a story in and of itself, Swamp Angel is quite simply too long, and really not at ALL angelic in nature and scope, as I personally have huge issues with the fact that Thundering Tarnation is destroyed, is killed, simply because the bear has ransacked food stores (as from the text of Swamp Angel, it becomes readily apparent that while the beast is indeed a major and annoying nuisance, Thundering Tarnation is also not really ever much of a threat to life and limb, just to the settlers' stored provisions, and I frankly would have much preferred a different ending, with the bear bested by Angelica, chastised, perhaps even being driven off, but remaining alive).

And finally, while I can and do always appreciate traditional tall tales for their folkloristic contents, for their traditional sources (even if as tales, they are generally not all that personally appealing), the fact that Swamp Angel is NOT even based on tradition, but is just an original and thus, for me, rather artificial tall tale type makes it (unfortunately) totally uninteresting to and for me (both aesthetically and especially academically). I do admit and even realise that I often enjoy and even cherish original Kunstmärchen-type fairy tales as simply delightful, readable stories, but I guess I am just not enough of a North American tall tales enthusiast to like (or even much appreciate) Anne Isaac's printed words, her text. And thus, although I do find it cheering to have a strong and Amazon-like woman appear as the heroine, I just am not able to take enough pleasure from the story of Angelica wrestling with Thundering Tarnation, both textually and artistically, for me to rate Swamp Angel with more than one star (was debating a two star rating, but no).

Ann says

The words of SWAMP ANGEL's tall tale about a superhuman heroine in Tennessee in the early 1800s are perfectly matched by Zelinsky's lush, primitive-style paintings.

Lisa Vegan says

I read this for the Picture Books club over at the Children's Books group, where this month's theme is North American folk tales. This one surprised me because it is an original tale; I was expecting and I would have preferred to read a more traditional tale, although, if I'd enjoyed this story and its illustrations more than I did, I'd probably have been thrilled with a brand new tale.

My favorite things about this book were the different wood grains background of the illustrations, the last page where it is told and shown how Ursa Major/the bear got into the sky, and the tall girl protagonist reminiscent of Paul Bunyan.

The illustrations overall were not my favorite. The story was funny, in parts, especially at the very beginning when the girl is born so big and grows so fast. I wasn't wild about the bulk of the book being about Swamp Angel (who got that name by saving people) and a bear going after each other. Poor bear, though at least he was made good use of, but I'd have preferred the heroine to be saving people vs. in a battle with and killing a bear.

Ronyell says

I actually heard of "Swamp Angel" when I first saw it on one of the "Weston Woods" videos. "Swamp Angel" is a Caldecott Honor Book by Anne Isaacs along with gorgeous illustrations by Paul O. Zelinsky and it is about how Tennessee's greatest woods woman, Swamp Angel, tries to outsmart a threatening black bear named Thundering Tarnation. "Swamp Angel" may have some scattering images that might be a bit irritable for some children, but it still a great read for children who love tall tales!

Seeing as how this was Anne Isaacs' first book, Anne Isaacs did a wonderful job at writing this story as she wrote this story in a southern dialect as she uses various phrases such as "she lifted those wagons like they were twigs in a puddle" and "seems he'd tried the sweet approach and got licked in more ways than one" and they greatly contributed to the southern background of this story. What I loved the most about this book was the humor and the characters as the humor of the story comes from the battle between Thundering Tarnation and Swamp Angel as they use various odd elements to defeat each other such as Swamp Angel using a tornado to bring Tarnation down from the sky. The character that stood out the most for me was Swamp Angel herself as she is shown as a sweet and strong woman who would help out anyone in her town and even goes up against Tarnation by herself just to get his pelt, which her character would greatly encourage children to go for their ambitions no matter what anyone else says. Paul O. Zelinsky's illustrations are as usual gorgeous to look at, especially of the image of Swamp Angel herself as she has red pigtails, a yellow bonnet hat, and a blue dress with a white apron in front and is the size of a giant as she takes up most of the pages that she is on. Paul O. Zelinsky has also done a great job at illustrating Thundering Tarnation as a huge black bear who is twice the size as Swamp Angel and also provides Thundering Tarnation with realistic facial expressions that ranges from anger to greed.

The only problem I had with this book was that the illustrations seem a bit scattered all over the pages and what I mean by that is that for example, there are two pages that have five forms of Swamp Angel performing random heroic acts for the people of Tennessee and that might be a bit frustrating for children who are used to seeing one or two people per page performing one act at a time.

I truly think that "Swamp Angel" is an inspiring story about self-confidence and bravery that many children will enjoy and for anyone who love tall tale stories will definitely enjoy this book. I would recommend this book to children ages five and up since the southern language might confuse smaller children.

Abbigail Harper says

I like the folk tale or "tall-tale" aspect of this book. When I was in elementary school we had a unit about tall-tales in the 3rd grade, however they were all about males like Paul Bunyan, etc. I like how Swamp Angel is a tall-tale with a strong, female, lead character who saves the people. That being said, I think this book would be great to use in lesson on tall-tales.

Katie Fitzgerald says

I'm not crazy about tall tales and folk tales, but this one wasn't bad. The illustrations have so many details in them, kids can spend literally hours looking at everything and gathering every aspect of the story. It's also one of the few tall tales I've read that is short enough to read aloud to preschoolers in one sitting. I think kids enjoy stories with larger-than-life characters, and Angel is definitely one of those, and I think girls, especially, would be glad to see a heroine who fights bears with her bare hands!

Courtney Dyer says

Swamp Angel is a Caldecott Honor book written by Anne Isaacs and illustrated by master illustrator Paul O. Zelinsky. Zelinsky, known for his beautiful oil paintings, doesn't hold back for this Tennessee tall tale. For the illustrations, he used oil paint on a combination of cherry, maple, and birch veneers.

Swamp Angel was known for her buckskin bravery. When her town is terrorized by a large bear named Thundering Tarnation who is eating up all of their winter rations, she sets out to find the bear and get rid of him.

I really wanted to like this book more than I did, but I just couldn't get into the story and found myself more drawn to the illustrations than to the actual words. I definitely had to go back and reread it a few times as I caught my mind wandering. A few things that I liked about the story were the use of a female heroine and the dialect of the words that kind of forced you to read it with a southern twang. As a teacher, I would use this book with upper elementary students in a genre study of traditional literature, particularly tall tales, and to compare/contrast to the story of Paul Bunyon.

SamZ says

1995 Caldecott Honor - Favorite Illustration: None of them were really enjoyable to me. I guess my favorite would be the last page where the two kids are sitting on a stump looking up at the stars.

I really didn't like this story. It was an "original" tale about Swamp Angel, a towering woman who helped shape the Smoky Mountains and surrounding areas in Tennessee. However, the story was set up like it was going to tell a bunch of stories about Angelica, and then only told one story about her wrestling a bear. Also, while I usually like Zelinsky's illustrations, these ones were just boring/ugly to me. Not a fan.

Bethany says

Angelica Longrider was born to do big things. Even though she did build her first cabin until she was two years old, Angel, as she is nicknamed by fellow pioneers, quickly earns legendary status by rescuing mud-stuck wagons, putting out cabin fires, and preventing floods. However, when a fearsome beast, a bear named Thundering Tarnation, threatens the well-being of the community, Angel quickly takes matters into her own Paul Bunyan-sized hands and battles the bear to the death. Their land-altering conflict creates the Smoky Mountains and bear constellation, but ends with Angel defeating the bear and winning his majestic pelt. The story ends with a fabulous feast, and Angel's celebration of her achievements.

Anne Isaacs' first picture book, *Swamp Angel*, demands a giant amount of attention and consideration in her adaptation of an American tall tale. The story's focus on a female character and female heroism is refreshing while the strength of the story lies in humorous exaggeration and breath-taking action. Readers will be entranced as Angel and the bear tangle back and forth. Isaacs' use of idioms and expressions, such as "varmint" "Thundering Tarnation" "dewdrops on corn", are fun to read and lend themselves to a pleasurable drawled read aloud. Overall, the telling of the story is authentic and refreshing, like a breath of Tennessee mountain air.

Paul Zelinski's wood-veneer paints are a worthy companion to Angel's broad story. Painted in a primitive American-style, the pages bring to mind detailed Colonial-style works as well as the calming Americana scenes of Edward Hopper. The pages are full of details that will engage and delight the reader: time should be taken in any reading of this book to fully appreciate the the expression of the characters and details of their lives. Period dress and pioneer culture find accurate representation: coonskin caps and prairie dresses abound.

Isaacs draws attention to tall-tale that deserves just as much attention as Paul Bunyan, John Henry, and Pecos Bill. Angel takes the stage in a way that all readers will love younger readers will enjoy the illustrations and action while older readers will value the illustrations, action, and the story's central message: having a big heart leads to big things.

Carissa says

This book was a hoot to read. It used dialect, which drew a Southern accent out of me as she wrestled with the big ol' bear. Caldecott honor? Caldecott medal, I say.
If you like this book, you may like "John Henry" by Julius Lester.

Sydney Funk says

- *Swamp Angel* is the tale of larger than life Angelica Longrider. Angelica became known as Swamp Angel when she saved settlers in the covered wagons from the swamp, lifting them like there was no problem at all. Swamp Angel became the greatest woods woman Tennessee had ever known. This larger than life tale tells the story of Swamp Angel and Thundering Tarnation's epic fight across Tennessee.
- K-5th grade
- I would use this in an English class and a history class.
- Individual students that could benefit from reading this book include students that enjoy folktales and larger

than life depictions of stories.

- In would use this in a literature circle with other folktales from the Tennessee area. Students would put together a timeline of events. What happened first and how do you know? Show evidence from the text.
 - I would use this book with the whole class when determining elements of a story. Students would determine the characters, plot, setting, action, etc.
 - Other books like this include Paul Bunyan
 - This is a Caldecott honor book and is available as an ebook or audio book.
-

Karol says

Neither the story, nor the illustrations did much for me. The faces on the characters made them look like dolls or mannequins to me - stiff, artificial, and overly made-up. The story itself was kind of interesting, but the telling of it seemed a bit disjointed.

louisa says

Great. Oil paint on cherry, maple, or birch veneer. Sly and over-the-top at the same time with lots of great visual jokes and characterizations and wonderful writing. A female Paul Bunyan set in the woods and mountains of Tennessee. Would definitely buy for tomboy, oversized girls.

Beverly says

Even though it is not a true folktale, but an original story, I liked the story and I loved Zelinsky's primitive style artwork. His illustrations were created on cherry and maple veneers, which are wonderful frames for the paintings.

Kathryn says

There were things I liked a lot about this book. First, it's a very tall tale with a very tall girl and a very big bear. I like the "just so stories" aspect because we learn how the Smoky Mountains were named, and how Ursa Major came to be in the sky (tall tales style, of course). And some of the writing style was quite fun, in the best folksy, tall tale fashion--why, it's no wonder "stories about the Swamp Angel spring up like sunflowers along the wagon trails."

Now, I was not a big fan of the illustrations, which surprised me! And I also was not a big fan of the fact that the story centers around the Swamp Angel taking down the bear Thundering Tarnation. Of course, I understand that back in the day it would have been a serious threat to one's life and family to have a big bear wandering around, eating up stores of food and threatening human and livestock safety. And I suppose this story has a better outcome than it could have done--but I still find it hard to enjoy any story where an animal is hunted.

Also, there is no traditional/historical background to Swamp Angel--it's something from Isaacs' imagination. Sure, there is no reason we can't have sparkly new tall tale sprout up any time, any place--but I think I would

have found more reason to appreciate this one if it had been something passed down through the generations.

Dolly says

This is an interesting folktale, similar to the "Paula Bunyan" book I read a month or so ago. It's full of tall tales and exaggerations and is a fun story to read aloud. The illustrations by Paul O. Zelinsky are funny and have an old fashioned feel.

This story was selected as one of the books for the August 2010 - North American Folktales reads at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

This book was also selected as one of the books for the November 2016- Caldecott Honor discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Rachel says

I was a little disappointed with this book. I mean how can you go wrong with Paul O. Zelinsky doing your illustrations (folk-art style)? Even though his paintings are great, this original tall tale, which is kind of like the Southern female version of Paul Bunyan, fell sorta flat. Angelica Longrider, aka Swamp Angel due to her rescuing some pioneers in a swamp, is pretty impressive. She uses rain clouds to stop a house fire, uses her apron to stop a flood, just to name a couple feats. She decides to enter the contest to kill a powerful huge bear nicknamed Thundering Tarnation ("those were the words most commonly heard when he was spotted in the neighborhood"). Nobody thinks she can do it because she's a girl, but she beats all of the men and manages to kill the bear. But then the book just ends. I don't know I thought maybe the author would show her getting presented with an award or something, after spending all that time with the bear, instead of her just walking off in the sunset with the bear pelt. It did however, earn a 1995 Caldecott Honor award. Recommended for ages 5-9, 2 stars.

Christine says

Swamp Angel is a tall-tale story with a female main character who has giant-like qualities. The setting takes place in a wooded area of Tennessee during the pioneer era. The book's illustrations ties into the setting. Each page is made to resemble grains of wood. The story is contained within outlined frames. The villagers were being attacked by a huge bear. They were afraid of it and many had attempted to capture the bear so it would not hurt anymore villagers. When Swamp Angel went to help out many thought she would be unsuccessful but worked itself out in the end. I like how the main character is a female because the tall-tale that I am aware of have the main character being a male. I would use this story when teaching other tall-tales to focus on themes and characteristics of the genre.

Crystal Marcos says

2 1/2 stars~I started with Swamp Angel, it looked interesting. I liked the cover and I have to say I wanted to like this book more than I did. The title itself is a promising title. I couldn't really get into the story. I found

myself more interested in the illustrations themselves. Again, I liked the cover but once I got inside I wasn't really thrilled. I agree with Kathryn I like the tall tale aspect of the story but I didn't feel it really delivered. I also couldn't get past the tobacco and wine in a children's story.

Luann says

I quite enjoyed this. I read it to my library classes as part of a lesson on tall tales. It worked well in illustrating the elements of a tall tale yet was a story they hadn't already heard. Overall the students enjoyed it, especially the illustrations. This is definitely deserving of its Caldecott Honor! The attention to detail that carries from page to page throughout the story is a lot of fun. Many of my students noticed the dog that appears on nearly every page - even though he is TINY.

A very few students mentioned the more intense part towards the end, but mainly I think because they weren't expecting it. This might not be appropriate for younger students, but the students I teach are older and can certainly handle the touch of violence in this book. I think it fits in well with the setting and time period, though. If a giant bear were eating all of your food stores and leaving you nothing with which to survive over the winter, what would you do? Probably the same thing Swamp Angel did in this story, if you could.

Note: I think this would also work well in a writing lesson as an example of voice and word choice.
