A is for Abigail: An Almanac of Amazing American Women

Soldiers, scientists, performers, writers, entrepreneurs, politicians, quilters, pilots... as author Lynne Cheney writes, America’s amazing women have much to teach our children—and much inspiration to offer us, as well. Coming on the heels of America: A Patriotic Primer (Cheney’s previous collaboration with illustrator Robin Preiss Glasser), A Is for Abigail celebrates the achievements of women in American history, with a special emphasis on the individuals who helped win equal rights for women. As with America, Cheney uses an alphabet book format to introduce hundreds of remarkable real women: O is for SANDRA DAY O’CONNOR and others who were first. In addition to the first woman Supreme Court Justice, the O page includes Wilma Mankiller, first woman chief of the Cherokee Nation; Jeannette Rankin, first female member of Congress; and Nellie Tayloe Ross, first woman governor. Glasser’s playful illustrations are lively and busy, inviting readers to explore Abigail Adams’s farm or the crowded city block that houses V is for VARIETY, with its DNA lab, dance studio, dentist office, and PERSONS at WORK sign. Snippets of information about each featured woman give a taste; ideally, readers will seek more in-depth biographies about the historical figures who pique their interests. (Ages 6 to 9) --Emilie Coulter

My Personal Review:
When John Adams began considering what laws should be made, his wife Abigail wrote from the family farm: I desire you would remember the ladies. A familiar line in American history, but here is the rest of it: If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound to any laws by which we have no voice or representation.

Is it any wonder that Writer Lynne Cheney and illustrator Robin Preiss Glasser begin their alphabet Almanac of Amazing American Women with Abigail Adams? Cheney, herself the wife of a Vice President and accomplished children’s writer, and Glasser, a former ballet soloist and
professional childrens illustrator, have jointly produced several books about Americana: Our 50 States: A Family Adventure Across America and America : A Patriotic Primer. This one about women throughout American history is dear to the hearts of both women.

Because Abigail is first in many ways, she gets a two-page spread filled to the edges of the pages with depictions of life on the Adams farm, which Abigail ran single-handedly while John helped found a country. Glassers illustrations are a delight to the eye. A child could spend quite a while on each of these pages, just reveling in the details of the lively illustrations.

B is for Elizabeth Blackwell, the center figure and the first woman to earn a medical degree, with four other healers in the four corners, plus names of nine other written in the empty spaces. It is fun to follow the trails of words and count the extra names. There is a fabulous home-spun illustration representing Emily Dickinson, Americas greatest poet, along with names of other women poets tucked in here and there in the rose-entwined trellis lining all four sides.

F for First Ladies is another two-page spread with Glasser depicting each first lady on a teacup, teapot, sugar bowl, creamer. It is quite elegant and prettified. Barbara Bush is quoted: Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow in my footsteps and preside over the White House as the presidents spouse. I wish him well!

And so the book goes. The P section is a fold out of four pages illustrating performers: Sarah Caldwell (conductor), Tina Turner, Maria Tallchief (ballerina), Gilda Radner, Mahalia Jackson, just to give a flavor of the names.

Other letters: Trailblazers, W for Edith Wharton and women writers, X marks the ballot, Z for Babe Didriksen Zaharias and other strong women, N for Louise Nevelson and other creators of beautiful things, and K for Mary Kies and other inventors and entrepeneurs.

If you cannot tell I think this is an absolutely fabulous book for children, then I did not gush enough. Oh, in case you didnt know, in 1924 Gertrude Muller started a company to market the potty seat she had invented. Glassers illustration is too precious.

Very highly recommended for all ages.

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