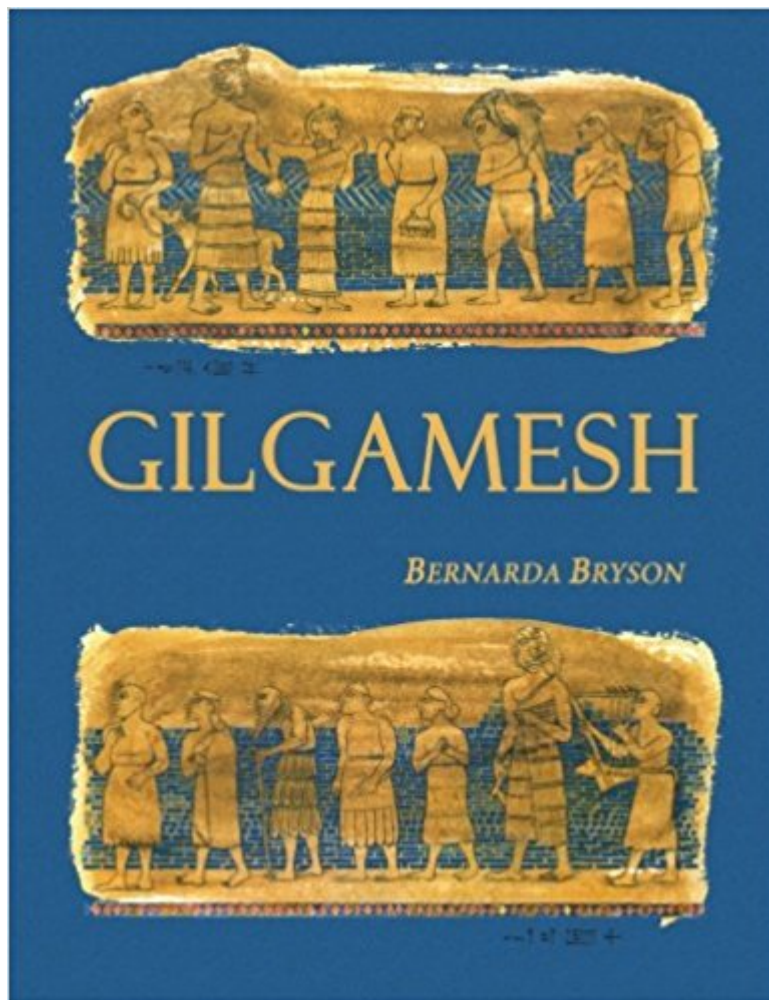


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Gilgamesh



Synopsis

GILGAMESH is the oldest known legend. In this beautiful, full-color version, the distinguished author and artist, Bernarda Bryson, has created a richly moving interpretation of the mighty deeds of Gilgamesh, the great hero-king, part god and part man. First written down in Sumerian cuneiform 3,000 years before Christ, the story of Gilgamesh tells of a great flood and of one man, befriended by the gods, who survived by building an ark. In the feats of Gilgamesh and his companion, Enkidu, a monster-man who becomes gentle and loves and respects the King, are found the sources of the great mythological heroes, Hercules, Jason and Theseus. In addition to its importance in the history of children's literature, GILGAMESH is an exciting, dramatic and often amusing tale—setting jealous god against jealous god, and man against man in remarkable battles of wit and strength. Bernarda Bryson has set down a stirring epic accompanied by exquisite prints which impart to the reader her own lifetime fascination with the myth of Gilgamesh.

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Customer Reviews

BERNARDA BRYSON, an American painter, lithographer and author, has illustrated a number of books, both her own and of other authors. She has also illustrated for Harper's Magazine, Fortune and Scientific American. Her text of GILGAMESH is an important contribution to the field of children's literature and represents many years of research, while her illustrations draw upon an enormous wealth of archeological material.

Revived a dormant awareness of how important this story is on many levels.

Very well written and easy to understand.

Great book for young and old

The story of Gilgamesh is certainly a strange one. He's the king of a Mesopotamian city, who refuses to advances of a goddess or priestess, kills the mythical beasts sent by the gods to punish him for his insolence, and comes across a wild man named Enkidu out in the woods. As for Enkidu, he's a wild man who acts as a foil to the more civilized Gilgamesh, even though they become best of friends. Regardless of the legend, Bernarda Bryson's version is wonderful. She write the story very simply, without too many long words to complicate things and bore the reader. Since the original story was written in Sumerian cuneiform, it doesn't make much sense to write the English translation with Shakespearean levels of prose, and this version is perfect for kids. The illustrations are wonderful too. They follow the style of the original clay tablets on which the legend was documented, without all the over-the-top bombardment of a lot of today's children's books.

I'm teaching a Great Books class for 7th-8th graders, and have been trying to find a version of this story that is appropriate for this age group. We've read "Gilgamesh the Hero" before but I feel like it's childish in some ways but too adult in others. Bryson's version is perfect--the language is eloquent, the sentence structure poetic, and the illustrations really add to the whole feel of the book. I'm so pleased I found this version.

Why this has gone out of print I do not know. This version of the story can be read to a child over the course of about 7-10 nights. Better than Zeman's version, this story fleshes out details that make the actions of the characters much more understandable. For example, when Gilgamesh rejects the goddess Ishtar, who has decided Gilgamesh should be her next husband, in Zeman's version you really have no sense why he rejects her. Marrying a goddess seems like a good thing, but for some unexplained reason Gilgamesh doesn't go for it. In Bryson's version however, she spells out Gilgamesh's reasons; Ishtar, once she has the attention of the one she desires, grows tired of the hapless soul and then she destroys them. Suddenly Gilgamesh's action makes sense. In another example, Zeman leaves out any reference to Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, while in Bryson she is an important character whom Gilgamesh seeks out for advice. This story is a wonderful tale.

Bryson's retelling gives us insight into characters who lived 5000 years ago. She makes it possible to understand their way of life. Where else can you read about heroes who bear bronze swords and seek out the man who survived the flood?

I got this book out of the children's section of our local public library and now am trying to get my own copy. There is just something about this book, the way that it tells the story of Gilgamesh and his best friend, Enkidu (sp?); their battles with the magical bull; the original story of the Flood; how the first walled city was built; the troubles with Ishtar; and other tales of the dawn of history, that touches my heart. The author is showing us mankind's childhood, and she tells the story with simplicity. Her illustrations remind us of the stone carvings and other artifacts of Mesopotamia, yet somehow they convey movement and expression beautifully. The story of Enkidu is my favorite. God creates him, and leaves him asleep in the forest. When Enkidu wakes up, he does not know he is a strong man, and runs away from the first rabbits and small animals that he sees. Gilgamesh eventually finds him and befriends him, and the two become inseparable. Enkidu becomes more or less civilized, but never, if I remember correctly, can bring himself to eat meat. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh goes to the underworld to bring him back. A lovely, lovely story from the time and place of Zarathustra, the sage who taught us to call God "Friend." For the sake of honesty, though, I must admit that my children didn't enjoy it as much as I did. Though they did read it, they might have enjoyed a more violent, colorful version. Still, the story and the illustrations of this version are historically accurate and, I would think, better art, and children have to be exposed to those things for awhile before they learn to appreciate them.

This is the best re-telling of the earliest epic of mankind, that I have seen for children. At just over 100 pages, it gives a much fuller sense of the story and its intricacies than Ludmilla Zeman's version. (Although her illustrations are much better). As a supplemental/part-time home schooling mother (I supplement what my children learn in school), I think this book is the best place to start any child's study of history and literature. (Mine started with this book at age 6.)

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