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Paul Adshad

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Paul Adshad : The Secret Hedgehog (Child's Play Library) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Secret Hedgehog (Child's Play Library):

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How can you write a science project about pets, when your fussy mother won't even let you keep a goldfish? How our hero succeeds provides the plot of this informative and hilarious story and will inspire us to keep our own nature diary.

"...and Paul Adshead's *The Secret Hedgehog*..., which is likely to inspire some imaginative science projects." -- Wilson Library Bulletin

From the Publisher *The Secret Hedgehog* provides an excellent opportunity to introduce the novel to children as young as five. At three years, we may have used Paul Adshead's *A Peacock on the Roof* to talk about what a chapter is and why it is used, especially in longer stories. A child who is read to on a regular basis from birth is imminently ready to have "More to Read" by age four or five. A special (inscribed) bookmark given with the first novel is a useful tool to help children understand about reading only a part of a book at a time. Casual observations relating to the chapter titles, the way each chapter has its own unique story. The way the chapters are tied together chronologically - all this will help children to develop a feeling for what a novel is. Ben's Nature Notebook is actually part of the story, with one entry in the form of a journal page at the end of each chapter. It is a combination of the recorded observations which Ben makes as he tries to care for the hedgehog and of the research which he does on its behavior, diet, defense mechanisms, predators, life span, the circumstances of its birth and growth, mating habits and habitat. His curiosity, his thirst for knowledge, his desire for understanding and his enthusiasm for the project are all infectious. Young readers will want to use Ben's notebook as a model for their own. We can encourage even young children to keep a sample diary in which they note daily observations of a pet (or even of a new baby in the family). This is an invaluable home writing exercise for beginning writers. It provides a real reason to write. Even if young children are only beginning to use invented printing and spelling, they will be excited to 'read' entries out loud to anyone who will listen. This is the best kind of reading and writing learning there is. The speed and ease of development will be a function of how much of this children do at this stage and of how much encouragement they receive. Older children can imitate and elaborate upon Ben's Nature Notebook for a school project. Paul Adshead obviously has had a grand old time comparing people to animals in his illustrations. Children will enjoy trying to think of and draw an animal they might choose to compare with a person they know. This can be done informally at home as a fun game and also as an art project in which the elements of caricature (using physical characteristics as well as personality traits and exaggerating them for emphasis) are discussed and developed. Paul Adshead has provided seventeen examples, a complete art lesson in a novel!

About the Author When asked to write a brief autobiographical account of how I came to be so interested in art, music and wildlife, I found myself faced with a problem. Most people would be able to list their achievements or qualifications, and mention how and where they had trained. I can do none of this, having no training or qualifications at all. On reflection, it seems that various circumstances and events during my childhood have shaped my life. When I was young, my father would tell me a different story every night, improvised on any subject I chose. Perhaps this has led to my own fondness of telling stories. So here is another story - not an imaginary story this time, but a true one... One of my earliest childhood memories is of being ill in bed with the measles. To keep me amused, my mother would sit on the bed and draw pictures for me to colour. I can still recall the picture on one particular day. A weasel sat on a log, surrounded by mounds of autumn leaves and conkers. Proud of the finished result, mother asked if there was anything else I would like as a special present to cheer me up. Without a moment's hesitation, I replied, "A tortoise". Although the request was not quite what she had expected, my very first pet arrived later that afternoon and was given the name of Fred! I remember being fascinated by his every movement, especially his trick of being able to withdraw into his shell. He was later joined by a rabbit, and the three of us would go on picnics together. They were happy, carefree days, but they came to a sudden end when it was time to start school. Up till that time I had spent very little time with other children; always preferring my own company and that of various little creature I adopted. Only a few days after starting school, something happened that has probably affected me ever since. During my walk home, which took me down a long, narrow lane, an older schoolboy chased after me brandishing a knife, shouting that he was going to kill me. Even now I can hear the pounding of his footsteps behind me as I raced towards home. I had no desire to ever return to school again, but of course I had no choice. In an attempt to rectify matters, the headmaster paraded me through every classroom until I found the culprit. But instead of solving the problem, this only served to isolate me further from all the other children. From then on I was a marked person, often I would arrive in the morning to find my books torn and my desk upside-down. Just like the tortoise, I began to withdraw into my shell. More and more I came to appreciate any time I could spend alone. At six and a half years old, I acquired my first pair of walking boots. They had animal footprints on the soles, and each one had a tiny pocket in the heel to hide a sixpence, in case of emergency. So, suitably shod, with my precious binoculars around my neck, and sketchpad and pencil in my pocket, I would spend many happy hours on nature rambles with my Uncle and Aunt. I remember walking to "secret places" in the wood to feed the squirrels. I had a pocket full of peanuts, and the long tailed tits, nuthatches and chaffinches would fly down to my hand to take them. Another day in the forest we fed all our sandwiches to a herd of fallow deer. Then later we were so hungry we ate the wild black cherries growing along the lane. Returning home I would spend hours making detailed drawings of the creatures I had seen. More often than not, 'dressing them up' in imaginary outfits of clothing. More and more I would daydream in a fantasy world of little creatures to escape the reality of an unhappy school life. From early on I had earned the nickname 'Birdboy', because of being more familiar with the names of feathered friends than my so-called school friends. My school report that year proved true indeed. It said 'Paul's artwork is very promising, but he finds it difficult to make friends.' As I grew older, my collection of pets gradually increased. Several rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, gerbils, a budgerigar, and a duck,

along with any orphaned or injured wild birds I happened to find. About this time, I began to take an interest in music, and started piano lessons. I took to it immediately, and a few months after beginning to learn, I composed my first piece of music 'Waltz in F'. It was very interesting for me to find something that could give me so much pleasure. My mind became filled with music, and nothing satisfied me more than the composition of a new etude or nocturn. Every single afternoon I would rush home from school, and sit straight down at the piano not even pausing to remove my coat. Then without stopping I would play for an hour or more until all thoughts of school had left me and I felt relaxed once more. The following five years in senior school were no happier. I lived for the time when I would be able to leave. Finally I opted to leave six months early, taking only my final exams in Art and English. Although I took both of these exams my papers were somehow lost. I always thought that I was a ploy to force me to stay on at school longer, but my mind was made up. I left school without any regrets, but also without any qualifications what so ever. My first job was in a gift shop. This gradually got me used to being with other people and began to undo some of the ill effects of years earlier. My bird collection increased further with the addition of several pairs of ducks, some rare breeds of poultry, peacocks and my most loyal companion of all - Toby, a yorkshire terrier. His delightful personality and gentleness with all the other creatures inspired me to begin writing short stories and verses to accompany the pictures I still painted of them all. So a few years later when the shop closed down, I decided not to seek reemployment immediately, but to take writing and illustrating more seriously and seek publication. But that is quite another story.....