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### Women's Adventures in Science: Nature's Machines -- The Story of Biomechanist Mimi Koehl by Deborah parks

Price at time of review: \$9.95

128 pp.

Joseph Henry Press

Washington, DC

2005

ISBN: 030909559X

Grade Level: **5-8**Reviewed by **Kari Augustine**

5th Grade Teacher



The 10-volume *Women's Adventures in Science* series, co-published by National Academies Press and Scholastic Library Publishing, should be on every middle and high school librarian's "must buy" list for 2007. The books are, first of all, beautiful. Each is filled with photographs, sidebars, glossaries, timelines, maps, and other graphics that provide key information about the field of science within which each woman has excelled. These text features are so well designed and captivating that they create excitement and interest that draws readers into the book.

Once inside, the true power of the *Women's Adventures Series* is revealed as eight talented authors weave the very personal story of each woman's journey from girl to scientist. The books begin with an overview chapter of the life and career of the scientist profiled, and then they move into a kind of flashback to her earliest years. The emphasis on adventure will appeal to a wider variety of young women than most

biographies.

Fifth-grade students with whom I shared these books loved looking at the photos of the scientists as girls and young women and reading about how their early interests, successes, and setbacks affected their choices in later life. Girls also strongly connected with the emotion in the stories. When asked what the coolest thing about the book was, one student said, "It told how she felt about a lot of things"; another commented that the scientist and author "told it how it really was." This emotional content ranges from academic and professional achievements or failures, to family joys and sadness, and it does much to help girls see these scientists as both passionate professionals and daughters, wives, and mothers. Older students will appreciate the struggles some scientists have experienced in their professional lives as they encountered discrimination due to gender, race or ethnicity, and their passion for their work as scientists. Because the books are paperbacks, they are practical for centers or a classroom library.

Late middle school and early high school students will make important connections from their own current coursework to college and career, and they will understand the impact that being an immigrant or having a hereditary disease in the family can have on one's work. Because each of these books is about a contemporary scientist, readers can also use the Internet to find out about continuing projects and research. The Women's Adventures in Science project, supported in part by Sara Lee Schupf and the National Academies of Science, also includes its own website (<http://www.iwaswondering.org>) with additional biographical and scientific information in the form of scrapbooks, activities, web-links, interactive games, and timelines.

The books range in Lexile from 890-1050 making them most appropriate for independent reading by middle and high school students, but younger students will enjoy browsing the books and reading selections. Although it is likely that this series will draw the attention of girls when displayed in school libraries and classrooms, one of the best ways to use these books will be in a "lunch bunch" or book club setting. The girls in my room buzzed about the books from the moment they chose them, and the books passed from hand-to-hand as they were finished. Next time I use these books, I plan to use a large map to flag the colleges these women attended and strengthen the link to post secondary education by connecting with some of these college websites as well.

Excellent science text and graphics, heartfelt personal stories, and captivating writing and design all serve as strong reasons to add these texts to your classroom or school library. If you need any further encouragement, let me offer these words written by an eighth-grade student. After reading four of the books, she wrote that they were "motivating and inspirational. They show that smart and successful women can be famous for their achievements in science and math, and

that women are not only famous for being celebrities. These books inspire young women to work hard, go to college, and go into a career that you are passionate about." I couldn't have said it any better!

*Review posted on 2/6/2007*

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