

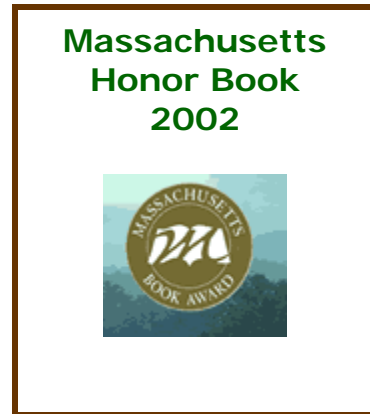
## ***Rocks in His Head***

By Carol Otis Hurst

Greenwillow Books

### **A Reading and Discussion Guide**

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#### **SUMMARY:**

When the author's father was a child, he started a collection. Many children collect sports cards or toys - but he collected rocks. So enchanted was her father with rocks that people began to say he had "rocks in his head". As an adult, her father's fascination with rocks continued and his collection grew. His rock collection was displayed proudly in the gas station he owned, and when the Depression forced his family to move to a ramshackle house, the rocks were displayed in the attic on tiny wooden shelves – even before he began much needed repairs on the house. During one of his visits to the Science Museum, the author's father fortuitously bumped into the director of the museum. From this encounter, he was chosen as a janitor for the Science Museum. Aware of his knowledge and understanding of rocks, the museum director finally convinced the Board to hire him as "Curator of Mineralogy." Rather than someone with a formal education, she needed someone who had "rocks in his head".

Suggested Age Level: 6—9

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. The main character in this story has a collection of rocks. Do you have a collection? What do you collect? Why did you choose this subject to collect?
2. People in this story often tell the author's father that he has "rocks in his head". What does it mean to have "rocks in your head"? Why do you think her father was not bothered by this comment?
3. Why do you think the author wrote the book about her father? Do you think the author is proud of her father? Is there someone in your family whom you are proud of? Why?

4. How do you think working in a gas station might have helped the main character in his search for different rocks? Do you think his collection might have been different if he worked in another job?
5. The Director of the Science Museum offered the father a job as a janitor. Why do you think he took the job? Do you think the Director made the right decision offering him the job as Curator even though he did not have a college degree?
6. The Depression was the result of the Stock Market crash and many people lost their jobs and businesses. The author's family lost their business and had to move. At the same time, the Depression led her father to the Science Museum and a new job. Do you think he would have gotten this job anyway? What happened to your family during the Depression? Ask your Grandparents or an older person what their experience was like during this time? How would they describe this time? Did anything good come from their hardships?

### **ACTIVITIES:**

1. The title of the book *Rocks in His Head* is an idiom. Idioms are used daily as a colorful way to describe someone or something (some other examples are “you are driving me up a wall” or “skating on thin ice”). Create and illustrate a book of common idioms. Play charades with your friends by acting out idioms from your book – which team can figure out the idiom in the least amount of time?
2. Your grandparents or neighbors may have lived during the Stock Market crash and the Depression. Interview them about this time period. Record their answers using a digital tape recorder, camera or camcorder. Create a digital story about their experiences.
3. Begin your own rock collection. Get a guide on rocks and classify the rocks you have gathered. Share your collection with friends. Trade rocks to fill out your collections. Look for new rocks while you are on vacation or in a different city.
4. Create a local field guide of rocks using the rocks you find in your town.
5. Visit a Science Museum. Look at their rock collections. Speak to their Curator and/or Director. How did they get their jobs? Did they always want to work in a museum?
6. Find out if your friends and classmates have a collection. Do they share their collections with other people? How long have they been collecting? Ask your librarian or principal if you can display your collections in your school or your local library.

7. Go on a Scavenger Hunt. Who can find the most rocks? Who can find the most unique rock? Who can find a rock shaped like a heart? Who can find a flat rock? Who can find a rock that looks like an arrowhead?
8. Make rock candy! You can find a recipe at your library or on the internet <http://www.exploratorium.edu/cooking/candy/recipe-rockcandy.html> .
9. Find a rock that you think is special. Write a Tanka poem about it. Your poem will be five unrhymed lines that describe the rock and/or tell how you feel about it. The first and third lines have two words. The second, fourth and fifth lines have three words. If your rock is big enough, use a marker to write your poem on it.
10. Become a Rockhound. Visit <http://www.fi.edu/fellows/fellow1/oct98/index2.html> on the internet. There are lots of rock related activities for you to do on this website.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

*Reprinted from* <http://www.carolhurst.com/bios/carolbio.html>

Carol Otis Hurst is a nationally-known storyteller, lecturer, author and language arts consultant. Born in Springfield, Massachusetts, Carol taught for many years, beginning her teaching career in Columbus, Ohio, and going on to Minneapolis before returning to her native New England. Her classroom experience included all the grades from pre-school through grade three.

Her interest in children's books led her to school library work and it was during her years as librarian at Juniper Park School in Westfield, Massachusetts that storytelling, which had always been part of her life, took an even larger role. As her reputation as a storyteller became more widely known, she began her long-time association with Teaching K-8 Magazine, conducting teacher workshops in children's literature, language arts and storytelling around the country for the magazine and writing two monthly columns for that magazine since 1973. Since that time she has written many articles and taught at colleges and universities around the country on the subject of literature, whole language and storytelling. She has worked with audiences in all fifty states as well as several other countries.

## HELPFUL LINKS:

Carol Otis Hurst's Children's Literature Site <http://www.carolhurst.com>

### *Suggested Reading:*

*1000 Facts About Rocks & Minerals* by Sue Fuller

*Everybody Needs a Rock* by Byrd Baylor

*Finding the Green Stone* by Alice Walker

*If You Find A Rock* by Peggy Christian

*Let's Go Rock Collecting* by Roma Gans

*My Ol' Man* by Patricia Polacco

*Rocks and Minerals* by Tracy Staedter

*Rocks, Fossils & Arrowheads* by Laura Evert

*Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown



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