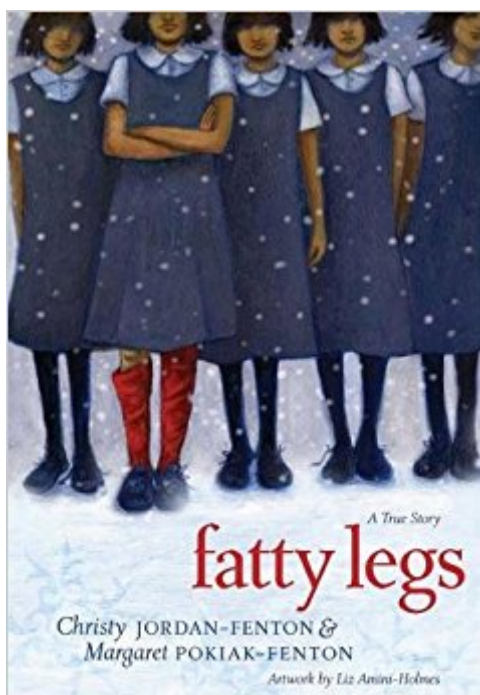


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# Fatty Legs



## Synopsis

Eight-year-old Margaret Pokiak has set her sights on learning to read, even though it means leaving her village in the high Arctic. Faced with unceasing pressure, her father finally agrees to let her make the five-day journey to attend school, but he warns Margaret of the terrors of residential schools. At school Margaret soon encounters the Raven, a black-cloaked nun with a hooked nose and bony fingers that resemble claws. She immediately dislikes the strong-willed young Margaret. Intending to humiliate her, the heartless Raven gives gray stockings to all the girls &#151; all except Margaret, who gets red ones. In an instant Margaret is the laughingstock of the entire school. In the face of such cruelty, Margaret refuses to be intimidated and bravely gets rid of the stockings. Although a sympathetic nun stands up for Margaret, in the end it is this brave young girl who gives the Raven a lesson in the power of human dignity. Complemented by archival photos from Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's collection and striking artworks from Liz Amini-Holmes, this inspiring first-person account of a plucky girl's determination to confront her tormentor will linger with young readers.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 11 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Gr 4-8—This is a powerful and moving autobiographical account, set in the 1940s, of one headstrong girl from an Inuvialuit community in the Arctic Circle. Margaret desperately wished to

attend one of the church-run schools that had been established in a town that was accessible only in the summer months. Her desire to learn the magic of reading was greater than her fear of the unknown or leaving her family and familiar way of life, and so her parents reluctantly agreed to allow her to attend for a year, which unexpectedly turned into two. At the school she was stripped of her Native identity and forced to conform in thought and comportment to the ways of the nuns and priests that ran the school. Hard labor in the gardens, laundry, cleaning, and helping in the local hospital all took their toll, but young Margaret was stubborn and clever, managing to find ways to stay strong and true to herself. Dark, expressive original paintings are dotted throughout the story and complement the serious tone of the narrative. The book closes with 15 pages of photographs from Pokiak-Fenton's scrapbook. Readers are also granted a glimpse into the way of life of the Inuvialuit, a culture with close ties to the land and rich in tradition. Youngsters will identify with Margaret's struggles and cheer her successes. An excellent addition to any biography collection, the book is fascinating and unique, and yet universal in its message. — Jody Kopple, Shady Hill School, Cambridge, MA. (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

I highly recommend this book for the discussion it would stir with students...Makes the harrowing residential school stories accessible to youth. (Resource Links)Archival photos from Margaret's collection give readers a sense of immediacy for the story being told and the strong, boldly colored artwork of Liz Amini-Holmes provides the clear and often heartbreaking truths about this brave woman's journey to literacy (Sally Bender [salsfictionaddiction.blogspot.com](http://salsfictionaddiction.blogspot.com) 2010-08-10)Fatty Legs tells the true story of an eight-year-old Inuit girl named Olemaun Pokiak and her experience with residential school.... Olemaun stays at the school for two years, during which she learns to deal with the torment and ridicule. One nun in particular...seems determined to break Olemaun's spirit.... The way in which Olemaun chooses to deal with her humiliation and face her tormentor are inspiring to anyone who has ever felt different... Fatty Legs is targeted at early readers with its large print and beautiful art, but the message and story itself can be appreciated by readers of all ages... While it is important to remember that Olemaun's story is just one experience of those who attended residential schools in the North during the 1950s and 60s, and that many suffered traumatic experiences there, Olemaun's story is not only one of despair at the way she was treated, but hope and resilience in how she refused to let others break her spirit. ([edwardsbookmagazineclub.com](http://edwardsbookmagazineclub.com) 2010-11-28)This book is definitely worth having in a public library. ([kidslit.menashalibrary.org](http://kidslit.menashalibrary.org) 2010-10-13)[starred review] A moving and believable account. (Kirkus Reviews)Presents a unique

and enlightening glimpse into the residential school experience and, most importantly, one little girl's triumph over her oppressors. (Quill & Quire) Margaret's character is engaging--her persistence, her strength, and her curiosity touch the reader. (CM Magazine 2010-11-12) Presents a unique and enlightening glimpse into the residential school experience and, most importantly, one little girl's triumph over her oppressors. (Quill and Quire) An excellent addition to any biography collection, the book is fascinating and unique, and yet universal in its message. (School Library Journal) This book makes the harrowing residential school stories accessible to youth. (www.papertigers.com 2011-02-16) A perfect companion to the study of First Nations issues, this story helps readers empathize with a real person whose determination never waivers in the face of adversity. (www.professionallyspeaking.ca (Ontario College of 2011-03-01) But more than a story of triumph, Fatty Legs fills a teaching resource void for middle readers, especially in recent years as Canada has worked to become more familiar and empathetic with what happened in residential schools. (Robyn Smith The Tyee 2012-07-30)

I was pleasantly surprised by Fatty Legs. I expected a depressing book about the hardships of a boarding school meant to strip children of their language, culture and family. Certainly the school tried to do that. But they were in a for a run for their money with Margaret. She would not be dominated or crushed, although the two years she spent in school were damaging and depressing, it made her more determined. Now I'm not opposed to sharing with children, even younger ones, the terrible things that have been done to native populations (North American and other places), but I think there is an appropriate way to go about it. Depressing and disheartening books have their merit, but I'm really glad this one featured a plucky, smart girl. While it shows the despicable nature of these boarding schools, kids get a strong girl to identify with and root for. Margaret's ability to be upbeat while telling a story that is, at heart, difficult, unjust, and upsetting is wonderful for the age group the book is aimed at. I know plenty of Native American children know of the horrors of these boarding schools and it's incredibly important that we share that and talk about it in hopes that it doesn't happen again. And in hopes of creating a generation of people who are more tolerant and understanding. I know I've said this before, but children are incredibly attuned to injustice and, for most, it's infuriating. Fatty Legs does an excellent job of showing the injustice that will make kids angry, but without going over the top and making it a book parents (especially white parents) will balk at. In other words, kids will get it. They'll know what happened wasn't right and they'll start asking questions and

opening conversations. The book includes photographs at the back of Margaret, her family, and many of the places mentioned in the story. In the text there are small notes in the margins directing the readers to these pictures which I think is unintrusive while providing some really interesting context. I'm amazed that she seems to have so many photographs of these critical moments from the story! It's incredibly fortunate. There are also definitions of unfamiliar words down at the bottom of the page, which again is unintrusive, but provides context for kids who don't know the words. Plus, what kid uses a glossary? The words are right there on the page, no need to flip back and forth breaking your concentration and flow. My only complaint about the book is the format. The full color pictures and larger size of the book make it feel younger. It's certainly appropriate for fourth graders, even a strong third grade reader could pick it up. But fifth grade and sixth grade, who would also make a perfect audience, might shy away from it purely based on looks. It drives me crazy when publishers do that to good books. Excellent book for reflecting the experiences of many Inuit families and opening up discussions with non-native children who are probably ignorant of what went on less than a century ago.

Category: Nonfiction Desperate to learn to read, 8-year-old Olemaun badgers her father to let her leave her island home to go to the residential school for Inuit children in Aklavik, in Canada's far north. There she encounters a particularly mean nun who renames her Margaret but cannot "educate" her into submission. The determination and underlying positive nature of this Inuvialuit child shine through the first-person narration that describes her first two years in boarding school, where their regular chores include emptying "honey buckets." The torments of the nun she calls "Raven" are unrelenting, culminating in her assignment to wear a used pair of ill-fitting red stockings--giving her the mocking name found in the title. The "Margaret" of the story is co-author, along with her daughter-in-law. Opening with a map, the book closes with a photo album, images from her childhood and from archives showing Inuit life at the time. The beautiful design includes thumbnails of these pictures at the appropriate places in the text and Amini-Holmes' slightly surreal paintings, which capture the alien flavor of these schools for their students. A moving and believable account. (Memoir. 8-12)

Eight-year-old Margaret Pokiak, whose name is Olemaun in the language of her people, the Inuvialuit, wants to learn to read. But her father has seen the true nature of the outsider and puts little value in such learning. But Margaret is determined to learn, and begs her father to let her go to

the Anglican school. Her father tries to warn her, showing her a pebble that has been changed, and all but worn away, by the slapping of the ocean."But Father, the water did not change the stone inside the rock. Besides, I am not a rock. I am a girl. I can move. I am not stuck upon the shore for an eternity," says Margaret. Her father relents, and so begins Margaret's adventure. But what she discovers is far from the fantasy she had imagined. She meets the malicious Raven, the pale-faced, beak-nose nun who becomes her tormentor. Like the ocean slapping the rock, the Raven assigns tedious chores to Margaret in an attempt to wear her down. She requires Margaret to wear thick, red socks, in contrast to the slender grey socks that the other girls wear, an act that earns Margaret the humiliating nickname, Fatty Legs. Beautifully written and illustrated with archival photographs from Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's personal collection, and artwork by the amazing Liz Amini-Holmes, this book becomes a mesmerizing, and moving account as Margaret faces the humiliations faced by many of the First People as they are "plucked" from their families and taken to the residential schools. As educator Keith Schock discusses on his website, Teach With Picture Books, this book becomes an excellent tool to teach about the process in which a dominant culture "...attempt[s] to indoctrinate children in the ways of the White men, they ignored Native wisdoms and skills which were key to survival in their environment." As he explains: "According to Tsianina Lomawaima, head of the American Indian Studies program at the University of Arizona, the intent was to completely transform people, inside and out. "Language, religion, family structure, economics, the way you make a living, the way you express emotion, everything," The government's objective was to "erase and replace" Indian culture, part of a larger strategy to conquer Indians." Margaret, however, stays true to her promise made to her father. Try as she might, the Raven cannot wear Margaret down. In fact, says Margaret: "The Raven thought that she was there to teach me a few things, but in the end, I think it was she who learned a lesson. Be careful what birds you choose to pluck from their nests. A wren can be just as clever as a raven." A truly remarkable story of a truly remarkable heroine.

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