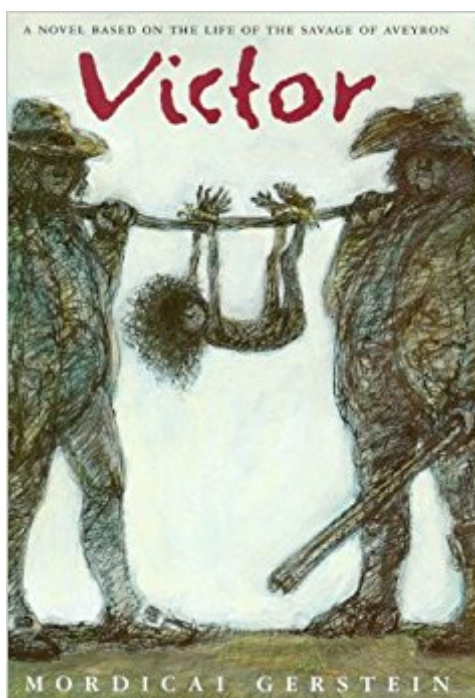


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Victor: A Novel Based On The Life Of The Savage Of Aveyron



Synopsis

"As the French revolutionaries begin time anew with year one of the new calendar, a feral child, who has somehow survived on his own in the wild, is delivered into the hands of Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, a doctor and teacher of deaf children in Paris...Readers will be mesmerized and even stirred by the questions Gerstein raises and attempts to answer."-Pointer/Kirkus Reviews

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1800, just after the French Revolution, two hunters emerged from the forest of Aveyron carrying a pole between them. From it dangled a creature--a wild pig? A scrawny bear? The villagers were astonished to realize that this creature was a human child--filthy, naked, and mute--who had lived all his life alone in the woods like an animal. What could be learned by studying the mind of this completely unsocialized being? A committee of learned scientists concluded that he was an idiot and unteachable. But a little-known young doctor, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, was convinced that he could teach the boy, whom he named Victor, to feel, think, and speak. The fascinating, true story of the failed education of the "Savage of Aveyron" has been the subject of many nonfiction studies and of the 1970 film by Francois Truffaut, *The Wild Child*. Mordicai Gerstein further explores this intriguing subject in *Victor* (and also in a picture book for 4- to 8-year-olds, *The Wild Boy*). The turbulent years of Itard's attempt to humanize the feral boy are described from the viewpoints of the obsessive but compassionate doctor; his housekeeper, the warm-hearted Madame Guerin; the young housemaid Julie who fears the wild boy's nascent sexuality; and Victor himself, whose thoughts are a stream of sensory images entirely unbound by any perception of selfhood. Older

teens will be fascinated by this strange and touching story and the many questions it raises about what it means to be human. (Ages 12 and older) --Patty Campbell

In southern France in 1800, hunters capture a naked, filthy and speechless pre-adolescent boy, whom they bring into town slung from a pole. Eventually he is taken to Paris and placed in a school for deaf boys. There his alleged obliviousness to anything but food and nature cause doctors to label him an idiot, and he languishes, ignored, until a young doctor, Jean-Marc Itard, takes the boy into his care. Drawing on historical sources, Gerstein (*The Wild Boy*, reviewed above) gives an arresting account of Itard's variously enlightened and bumbling (at times, cruel) efforts to socialize the boy, whom he names Victor, and to control his subsequent "explosive puberty." This makes for compelling intellectual and social history, with a vividly limned setting, peppered with disquieting ruminations on the nature of humanity, God, love and sexuality, as well as gruesome tidbits about the French Revolution. As a novel, however, it is ultimately unsatisfying because Gerstein jumps ahead in time from the close of Itard's six-year study of Victor to a penultimate scene just before the subject's untimely death at age 40. Thus, he summarily disposes of his protagonists (e.g., a melodramatic subplot involving the housekeeper's daughter reads like a cobbled-on "teen problem" story, then peters out just as it gets interesting; Itard's one romance takes place off-stage). Rather than imagining the inner life of his characters, Gerstein keeps readers at arm's length; Victor and Itard remain enigmas. For mature readers. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book is a must read for teachers, therapists, and anyone who works with children--especially damaged children. The educational approach is fascinating; the description of the boy's experience is touching. Just for clarity, this is a book for ADULT readers, not for children. Gerstein wrote a picture book on this subject (*THE WILD BOY*) which is appropriate and enjoyable for children.

Victor is one of the best books I've read in a long time (and I read a LOT). The issues presented will have readers talking and thinking about society, education, humankind, and mental health for a very long time.

This is a very good book but I am highly disappointed in... age recommendation...ages 9 to 12? Parts of this book include attempted rape scenes and masturbation scenes. Although well written and a good case study for adults, it is not for children.

WOW! This book was great! It didn't have much action, or much plot...but I learned a lot from the book. Like about geography, and other lil things. It was exactly five stars, but I thought a four would do it.

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