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BOOK REVIEW

Kagman Elementary School (2003) *Blue Marlin and other Billfish*. C.N.M.I Public School System, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. 98 pp.

Dandan Elementary School (2003) *The Tottot and Other Micronesian Doves and Pigeons*. C.N.M.I Public School System, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. 74 pp.

Garapan Elementary School (2003) *The Mariana Mallard and Other Oceanic Ducks*. C.N.M.I Public School System, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. 62 pp.

reviewed by

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Letao Press, Albury

What a delight to be asked to review this trio of books produced by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' Public School System. There was no need to be asked a second time: each of the books clamors to be picked up and enjoyed. Hardback, full color (on every page!) and with the highest of production values, they are beautiful artifacts even before the wonderful discoveries to be made inside spin their magic.

The books are a result of a series of Young Writers' Workshops run in each of three schools. For Dandan and Garapan this involved sixth graders, while in Kagman children from all grade levels took part. The process, documented in photographs, included guest speakers and field trips, a lot of research, and then the use of abundant imagination in writing and illustrating. The results are divided into two parts, as each book can be approached from either side (the upside down halves meeting in the middle). One side sticks to the

facts about the birds or fishes that are the focus, while the other side turns to fiction with legends and stories from around the world that feature these animals. The children of Kagman in their *Blue Marlin and other Billfish* also had the chance to write and illustrate their own stories. All the participants obviously had a lot of fun—and learnt a lot—and should be very proud of the books they have produced.

Also to be acknowledged are the workshop facilitators Katharyn Tuten-Puckett, Manuel Flores Borja and Anicia Q. Tomokane who led the students on this journey and did the editing, layout and photography for the books. The level of support the project received is impressive from the Governor Juan N. Babauta and Lt. Governor Diego T. Benavente (who was a guest speaker on marlin fishing), to Commissioner Rita Inos, and to the staff of the Department of Natural Resources, and of course the schools themselves. The funding for the

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printing, obviously generous, came from a grant from the US Department of Education.

Each of the books is a fine resource on interesting facts about the wildlife of the islands—Billfish, Doves and Pigeons, and Oceanic Ducks respectively. (There's also mention of the non-native animals the Marianas want to keep out like the brown tree snake). The stories—both old and new—are eclectic in their provenance (Africa, Australia, America, Europe, the Pacific) and are stimulating, while the illustrations are fresh, colorful and memorable. This was a very impressive

project that should act as an inspiration for other schools in the region. Homegrown resources for schools can only be positive in educating children to be proud of their community and their natural resources.

These writers and illustrators should be watched—they are the next generation that the Northern Mariana Islands Council for the Humanities can look to for future work as they build on the foundation of their latest publication *Microchild: An Anthology of Poetry*.