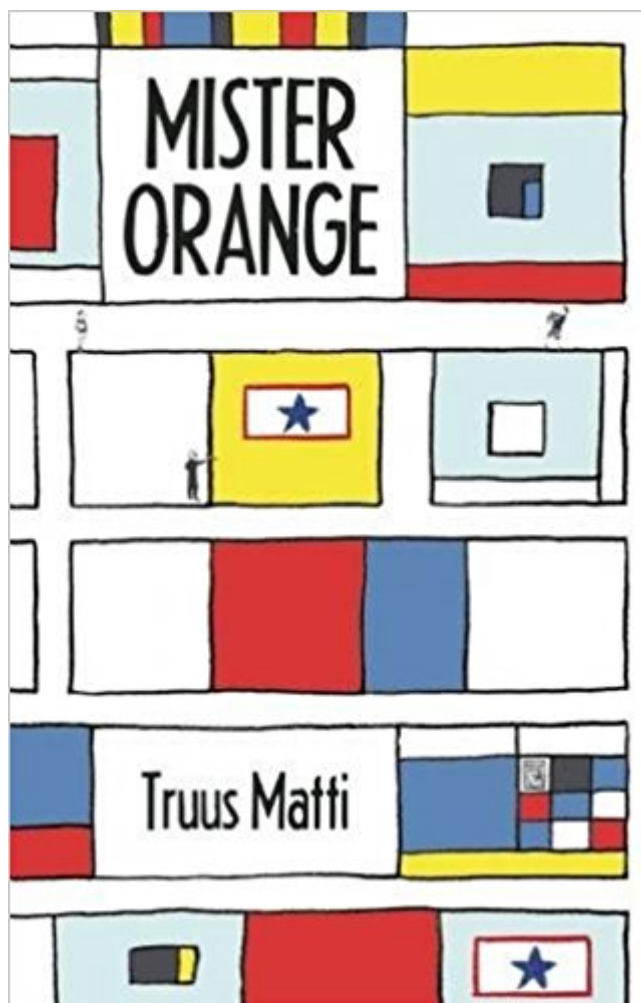


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# Mister Orange



## Synopsis

The year: 1943. The place: Manhattan. Linus Muller works at the family grocery store in the east 70s. When his oldest brother, Albie, leaves to fight in World War II, Linus takes over the grocery deliveries. One of his customers is an artist from somewhere in Europe who arranges to have a crate of oranges delivered every other week. Over the course of these deliveries, an intimacy develops between Linus and the man, whom he knows only by the name he gives him, Mister Orange. In the peacefulness of Mister Orange's spare kitchen, they discuss the war, the future, freedom and imagination. Through these conversations, Linus begins to grow up as he wrestles with the realities of war and the place of comic books, superheroes and the imagination in human life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 6-10-Linus Muller not only inherits his brother's shoes when Albie goes off to fight the Nazis, but he also inherits his job as a delivery boy in the family produce business. The new responsibilities to live up to his father's expectations for customer service and punctual deliveries using a home-built fruit cart in their 1943 New York City neighborhood weigh heavily on him. An eccentric customer with a funny-sounding name suggests Linus calls him Mister Orange, and Linus looks forward to the deliveries and seeing the man's modern-art creations. The bold use of primary colors against a bright white background is an eye-pleasing curiosity he is certain his parents would deem frivolous. At home, he eases worries about Albie and the war by becoming the custodian of Albie's cartoon sketchbooks, and he begins to hold imaginary conversations with one character, Mr. Superspeed,

who has promised with all his superhero powers to keep Albie safe. When Mr. Superspeed fails in his duties and Albie gets sick overseas, Mister Orange commiserates with Linus. This is Linus's coming-of-age story for the most part, but it also brings to light the life of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), who evolved the Neo-Plasticism style and was working on a painting known as Victory Boogie-Woogie during Linus's visits. An afterword offers factual information about the artist. The story is enough of an interest catcher for readers to explore further.-Vicki Reutter, Cazenovia High School, NY (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

**\*Starred Review\*** When his oldest brother, Albie, joins the army in 1943, Linus takes over neighborhood deliveries for his parents' New York City grocery store. Soon he befriends an unusual new customer, an artist who always orders a crate of oranges. Unable to catch his name, Linus calls him Mr. Orange. Daily life goes on, with occasional letters from Albie in training camp and, later, in France. While Linus initially sees only the glory of war, his attitude shifts as he gradually comes to understand it more fully. Meanwhile, Mr. Orange, a character based on the painter Mondrian, shares his love of order, color, music, and dance with his young friend. Several appended pages supply information on the artist, his work, and his years in New York. Children's novels translated from other languages are rare in the U.S., but even more uncommon are those with an American setting. A Dutch writer whose *Departure Time* (2010) was a Batchelder Honor Book, Matti offers a compact middle-grade novel that is involving and informative. Written with clarity and simplicity, this accessible book features deftly drawn characters and a nuanced view of family life on the American home front, as well as insights into Mondrian's personality and paintings. An original. Grades 4-6. --Carolyn Phelan

Primarily a book about a boy's changing perception of the war as he receives correspondence from his older brother. Set in New York, it tells the story of a Grocer's boy as he comes to realize that World War II is a real and dangerous thing. Mondrian is a side character that helps him gain a clearer understanding of the world through his artist's eyes. This novel does not really elaborate on Mondrian's life at all, and touches only on the interactions between the artist and the delivery boy as he brings his orange order to Mondrian's studio on a regular basis.

Fabulous

In this novel, Truus Matti explores the history of World War II and the life and artwork of Piet Mondrian. Through these aspects, he is able to create a novel about the life of a young boy and his outlook on the world. Throughout this coming-of-age story, the reader explores the world of Linus Muller, a young boy whose brother was recently shipped off to fight the Nazi's. With his big brother leaving to fight, Linus is forced to fill his shoes. As Linus begins to take on his roles, he meets a man with an unusual name. Due to the large shipment of oranges the man receives, he decides to call him Mister Orange. Mister Orange opens his eyes up to new possibilities through art and gives him a different perspective on the world. When looking through his older brother's sketch book, Linus discovers an imaginary super hero that he begins to see and talk to. After receiving letters from his brother about the cruelty of war, he questions his values. With the help of Mister Orange, Linus is able to work through the changes going on in the world and to find a balance. I believe many children would enjoy reading this book, because the characters are very relatable. I would recommend this books for grades seventh through tenth, especially those who enjoy art and comics! My personal favorite part of the novel was how the author intertwined history and art and based the novel off of real people and events. This book was very enticing and enjoyable! Review By Grace P., Age 14, Mensa 76

Few foreign books for children wind up translated into English, perhaps not surprisingly given the plethora of titles published each year by American and English-speaking authors from Canada, England, Australia, and other countries. Often the ones that do make it for release in the U.S. are special titles, and that's the case with the new historical novel Mister Orange by Dutch author Truus Matti. This title is especially unusual because, although written originally in Dutch and first published in the Netherlands, the book takes place in New York City during World War II and the protagonist is a young American boy, Linus, whose brother has shipped off to fight on the European front. Mr. Orange, as adults might guess who see the American cover (the Dutch cover looks completely different, as is often the case), is none other than the famous Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, who has moved to New York to escape the repressive political environment in Europe. With Linus' older brother off at the war, Linus inherits his grocery delivery route, and, unable to remember his customer's foreign name, dubs him Mr. Orange because of his twice monthly delivery of a box of oranges. The two strike up an unusual friendship, as Mr. Orange shares with Linus his unusual perspective on life. We learn, for example, how he attempted to capture in his work the raw energy of both boogie-woogie music and New York. At home, Linus' family anxiously awaits word from Linus' brother Alfie, and each letter is eagerly devoured. At first, the war seems like something out

of his brother's beloved super-hero comic books, with his brother the hero, until Linus reads part of a despairing letter that his parents tried to keep from him. As the real horrors of war hit home, Linus grows and changes as well. Can imaginary heroes like Mister Superspeed do any good in a world filled with so much uncertainty and horrors? Perhaps Mr. Orange can help Linus make sense of it all. Back matter includes information on Piet Mondrian and his life in New York City in the 1940's. Also included are additional resources for reading, watching on the Internet, and where to find Mondrian's paintings in museums around the United States. This is an top-notch historical novel that should appeal to boys as well as girls. It's filled with characters that young people can easily identify with, and also provides interdisciplinary content on World War II, the home front, and art. It can be effectively paired with a book on Mondrian or further exploration of the artist's works on the Internet in order to fully appreciate the mental images of his apartment and working style described in the book. Truss' first novel, *Departure Time*, was a 2011 Batchelder Honor Book and I won't be surprised if this book is also recognized by that committee which awards honors to the most outstanding books originally published in a language other than English and then translated and published in the U.S.

I echo the previous comment, which really says it all. This is a heartwarming, heartbreaking, picture of a great friendship and a difficult time. Lovely translation. Mister Orange deserves to be widely read, and the Batchelder Award increases its chances for more people to find and enjoy the book. Lots of curriculum connections, too, for those who must think about these things, principally art, biography, and WWII on the homefront.

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