



## Children's Book and Media Review

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### North

Irene Halliday

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Napoli, Donna Jo. *North*. Greenwillow Books, 2004. ISBN 0060579889. \$16.89. 344 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Adventure stories; Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Runaways--Juvenile Fiction; Inuit--Juvenile Fiction; Voyages and travels--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

What growing child hasn't pictured himself exploring some exotic location, fraught with challenges and dangers? Twelve-year-old Alvin is no exception. His life in a Washington DC apartment, with no father, an overprotective mother and aging grandma, and a nickname of "Dwarf" at school, leaves much to be desired. Alvin longs for adventure and to follow in the footsteps of his hero, Matthew Henson, North Pole explorer. Then one night, his overprotective mother goes too far and Alvin decides to temporarily run away to the "north". He has money, over 400 dollars earned by doing odd jobs all summer and fall, which he uses for train tickets and food as he works his way to the Arctic. He is helped on his way by the generosity of others, sheer luck, and his very naive, but courageous, personal resolve. His exploits are sometimes comical, sometimes exciting, sometimes life-threatening, and always interesting. We come to care about Alvin, a polite and honest young man, who loves his mother and grandma, yet is determined to experience life beyond his home and neighborhood.

Not only are we treated to a realistic personal saga as Alvin's story unfolds, but along the way, we pick up intriguing bits and pieces of northern Canadian and Arctic vocabulary, geography, and culture. One of the effects of Napoli's adventure is the interest in the Arctic it ignites, awakening the desire for further reading about the Inuit culture, polar bears, wolves and other Arctic wild life, icebergs, and the northern lights. In addition to its obvious literary merits, *North* would be a useful enhancement to various upper elementary and junior high classroom experiences. Enthusiastically recommended!