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Poor Is Just a Starting Place

Sarah J. Wanlass

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Wyatt, Leslie J. *Poor Is Just a Starting Place*. Holiday House, 2005. ISBN 0823418847. \$16.95. 196 pp.

Reviewer: Sarah Wanlass

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Depressions 1929--Juvenile fiction; Poverty--Juvenile fiction; Family life--Kentucky--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

At a glance, *Poor Is Just a Starting Place* appears to be another doleful tale about life during the Great Depression. Instead, it is a story of family and friendship, joy and despair, hard work and determination.

Artesia May Wilson, or "Artie", is twelve years old. She goes to school (when she is not helping out on the family farm) in a one-room schoolhouse; she comes home to a small cottage in the hills of central Kentucky, just down the street from Sarah Jane Bratcher's large, white, comfortable home. Life is hard work and Artie hopes for a future far beyond the harsh realities of farm life and a dysfunctional family. She longs to finish her schooling one day and go to college. This prospect in mind, Artie enters a state-wide essay contest with a twenty-five-dollar savings bond offered for the first place winner; the topic: heritage. As she contemplates her family's strength, we see a change in the way she views her life experiences. As Artie struggles to understand her family and reconcile her frustration with an overbearing father, push-over mother, and poor circumstances, readers will see her begin to understand the value of determination, persistence, and humility.

Wyatt's writing is very descriptive; she paints a detailed picture of life for poor, backwoods, farming families during the financial and agricultural disasters of the late-twenties and early-thirties. There is plenty of dialogue, through which readers become familiar with the vernacular of Artie and her small-town Kentucky clan. *Poor Is Just a Starting Place* is a good read that gives insights into the low quality of life for many during the Great Depression, yet uplifts readers with a theme of hope for the future.