



2006

Torchlight

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Hurst, Carol Otis. *Torchlight*. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. ISBN 0618276017. \$16.00. 142 p.

Reviewer: Pat Frade

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Irish-Americans--Juvenile fiction; Prejudices--Juvenile fiction; Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Ten-year-old Charlotte Hodge and her brother Zach were orphaned when their parents died of cholera. They go to live with their aunt and uncle in Westfield, Massachusetts. Westfield is a small town with two groups of citizens, the Yankees and the Irish. There is a prejudice among the Yankees against the Irish. Being new in town, Charlotte tries to make friends with the other Yankee girls, but they ignore her. The first day of school, Charlotte meets Maggie Nolan, an Irish girl and they become fast friends. But the friendship causes tension in both families and Charlotte is harassed and bullied by other Yankee girls. As tension among the two groups rise, a Yankee mob threatens to burn down the new Catholic Church. Charlotte and Maggie's friendship, along with Charlotte's Uncle Hiram, helps to diffuse the mob.

This historical fiction novel is based on actual events in 1854 and introduces readers to the anti-Irish sentiments of that time. It is interesting to see the parallels of that era with the parallels of today's conflicts and prejudices with different races and religion. Parents and teachers can use this book to discuss friendships, prejudices, racism, and ignorance.