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The Castle Corona

Irene Halliday

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Creech, Sharon. *The Castle Corona*. Illustrated by David Diaz. HarperCollins, 2007. ISBN 9780060846220. \$19.89. 320 p.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fiction;

Subject: Orphans--Juvenile fiction; Brothers and sisters--Juvenile fiction; Kings--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Long ago, in a kingdom far away, the Castle Corona rested atop a high hill, its reflection sparkling in the waters of the winding Winono River. King Guido, Queen Gabriella, and their three spoiled children live splendidly there, yet without contentment. Across the river, far beneath the great castle, lay the dusty village of peasants. Here lives a stocky, industrious, poor, yet resilient people. Among them are two orphaned children, Pia and Enzo, who manage to feel happy in spite of cruel mistreatment from their merchant and master Panzini. Unbeknownst to them, exciting adventures and intrigues (even a new life in the castle) await them following their discovery of a mysterious leather pouch carrying the king's seal. Objects in the pouch have the power to unlock secrets from the children's past and change their lives forever. It is because of those secrets that the lives of the Royal Family become much more interesting.

Creech's new medieval tale emerges chapter-by-chapter as she jumps from life at the castle to life in the village. Readers will follow each member of the royal family and the orphan peasants as their lives become ever more intertwined. Though the plot develops slowly, the persistent reader will be rewarded with a satisfying resolution that leaves plenty of room for imagination. Along the way characters grow in self-understanding and wisdom, and find contentment and direction. The tale is greatly enhanced by the physical presentation of the book, which resembles an illuminated medieval text. The large typography, stylized letters beginning each chapter, full-color illustrations set on intricate filigree gold backgrounds, and unevenly-cut page edges help propel the reader back to the time of castles and kings, even before the first word is read. Gifted "illuminator" Diaz demonstrates the imaginative artistry that won him an earlier Caldecott medal. Though certainly not a page-turner, *The Castle Corona* is entertaining. A useful enhancement to a social studies medieval history unit, as well as art history studies.

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