



2010

Countdown

Debbie Barr

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Wiles, Deborah. *Countdown*. Scholastic, 2010. ISBN 9780545106054. \$17.99. 400 p.

Reviewer: Debbie Barr

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963--Juvenile fiction; Best friends--Juvenile fiction; Brothers and sisters--Juvenile fiction; Families--Juvenile fiction; Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962--Juvenile fiction; School children--Juvenile fiction; Elementary schools--Juvenile fiction; United States--History--1961-1969--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Franny is an eleven-year-old girl trying to figure out the personal problems that have crept into her life. A stressed out mother, a too-perfect brother, a sister with a secret, an Uncle suffering from war trauma, and a feud with her best friend keep her on her toes at home. When President Kennedy announces that Russian missiles have been sighted over Cuba, Franny's life goes from complicated to terrifying. She learns how to "duck and cover" but that does little to assuage the fear growing in her and her community. Right as the Cuban Missile Crisis comes to an end, she finds courage when her friend's life is in danger, and learns from her sister that, even though she is small, she can still make a difference.

Countdown is a perfect example of how to use mixed media, making it a visually appealing book. Wiles includes photographs, quotes, and advertisements from the sixties to enhance the story and give readers a better sense of the impending doom and fear that Franny is feeling. The story itself is no trifling matter. Franny's journey feels very real and relatable, even for those who did not experience the 1960s themselves. Her embarrassment and concern over things big and small, as well as her desire to understand the world and find peace, will be something readers of all ages will appreciate. Fantastic prose, humor, and use of mixed media keep this historical fiction fresh and exciting to the last page.

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