



2010

Heart of a Samuarai

Lauren McMullan

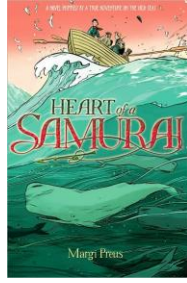
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Preus, Margi. *Heart of a Samurai*. Illustrated by Manjiro. Amulet Books, 2010. ISBN 9780810989818. \$15.95. 277 p.

Reviewer: Tessa McMillan

Reading level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fiction; Historical fiction;

Subject: Nakahama, Manjiro, 1827-1898 --Juvenile fiction; Japanese --United States --Juvenile fiction; United States --Relations --Japan --Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Fourteen-year-old Manjiro has runaway to become a fisherman. Hit by a terrible storm, Manjiro's crew drifts to a deserted island. After several months a whaling vessel discovers them. Manjiro and his crew are afraid to go aboard. Years before, Christian missionaries came to convert the Japanese, but to keep their culture intact the Japanese closed off their borders to foreigners and to Japanese people who had left. Even with this threat, Manjiro becomes an adopted son to Captain Whitfield, and is educated in America. Manjiro, in hopes of returning to Japan joins a friend going to California to find gold and fund his return. He is successful, but once there, is accused of being a foreign spy. Manjiro is finally released and returns to his family after eleven years. Because of his experience in America, Manjiro is promoted to a samurai. He teaches English to other samurai, and helps in the treaty to make Japan open to all countries.

Preus's story is based on the life of Manjiro Nakahama, who is said to be the first Japanese person to go to America. Several of the illustrations, drawn by Manjiro, are featured in the book. The story is suspenseful, well-paced, and beautifully detailed. Yet the ending of the book is too quickly resolved to the point that the content sounds like a history textbook, which weakens the foundation of Preus's story. In any case, the book was awarded a Newbery Honor.

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