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Dear America: Down the Rabbit Hole: The Diary of Pringle Rose

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Book Review

Title: Dear America: Down the Rabbit Hole:
The Diary of Pringle Rose

Author: Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Reviewer: Amanda Shrum

Publisher: Scholastic Inc.

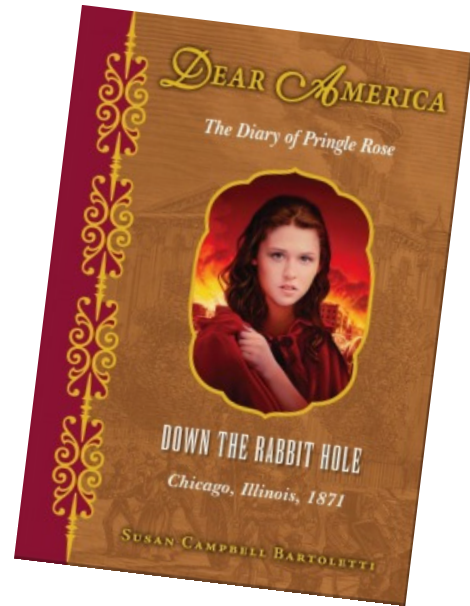
Publication Year: 2013

ISBN: 9780545297011

Number of Pages: 245

Interest Level: Intermediate

Rating: Dependable



Review

Life takes a devastating turn for Pringle Rose when her parents are killed in an accident. Pringle and her brother Gideon are put under the guardianship of their cruel aunt and apathetic uncle who have no understanding of Gideon's unique mental condition, which today would be diagnosed as Down syndrome. To avoid Gideon being sent to a school where abuse is likely, the two run away to Chicago to try and start a new life. On a very eventful train ride, the siblings are befriended by Gwen Pritchard and her three children. Gwen and her husband, Peter, ask Pringle to stay with them as a nursemaid and even pay Gideon to help out at Peter's work. Pringle takes joy in her position and expands her view of union workers and strikes. Unfortunately, another member of the Pritchard family is revealed to have had a hand in Pringle's parent's deaths and Pringle leaves with her brother. The two narrowly escape the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, while the Pritchards may not have been so lucky.

Down the Rabbit Hole: The Diary of Pringle Rose provides an excellent introduction to the development of worker's unions as well as the treatment of women and disabled children in mid-19th century America. The historical details are well developed and intriguing, but at the expense of the story. The characters in the novel are inconsistent throughout, such as when Pringle wishes her brother had died instead of her parents but then never proves to be anything but a completely loyal and protective sister. Even more puzzling is the Pritchard family being completely compassionate, helpful and thoughtful towards Pringle, but quickly throwing her out near the conclusion. The twist at the end feels contrived, lacks emotional weight and negates the growing complexity of Pringle's attitude towards union workers and capitalism. The epilogue feels strange for a fictional work, but the historical note provides plenty of interesting information about the true events that serve as a backdrop for the novel.