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Orphan Train Girl

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Molly has been moving from foster home to foster home ever since her father died in a car accident. Nowhere feels like home, and no one understands. Everything changes when Molly ends up with community service and has to help an old lady, Vivian, clean out her attic. As Molly helps Vivian, she learns more about Vivian’s childhood and history, and slowly Molly realizes that her and Vivian have more in common than she ever would have guessed. When Vivian was ten, she was placed on an “Orphan Train” that took her and many other orphans across the country in hopes of finding a family. As they unpack the attic together, they forge an unexpected friendship.

Orphan Train Girl by Christina Baker Kline is a beautifully written book about a period of history that many people are unaware of. The story goes back and forth between Molly, living in Maine in the present day, and Dorothy, living in Minnesota in 1929. The back and forth of the dialogue leaves the reader feeling engaged and invested in the book. This would be a great book to use with older elementary school students (third through sixth grade) to teach about the orphan trains that carted thousands of orphans across the US during the 1920s. The book contains no language or violence, but Dorothy lives in a few foster homes that are dirty and she isn’t treated kindly, which may be sensitive for some readers.