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The Secret Kingdom: Nek Chand, a Changing India, and a Hidden World of Art

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Book Review

The Secret Kingdom: Nek Chand, a Changing India, and a Hidden

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Illustrator

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Reviewer

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Rating

Outstanding

Level

Primary

Pages

48

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Nek Chand Saini was born and raised in a Punjabi village near the Himalayas. When the Punjab region splits into Pakistan and India, Nek has to leave his home, now in Pakistan, and flee to the new country of India. Once there, Nek finds work building the roads of Chandigarh, India's first modern city, but he longs for the culture and traditions of home. He finds bits of pottery, broken glass, bangles, bicycle tires and more remnants of his old world and fashions his very own "secret kingdom" over the course of seven years. When government officials discover his work, they threaten to destroy the beautiful creation, but the people of Chandigarh come to see Nek's world and beg the officials to recognize the secret kingdom as a work of art. Nek continues to expand and create his no-longer-secret kingdom, which still stands today as a beautiful representation of a world that no longer exists in the ways Nek remembers it.

The setting is crucial to Secret Kingdom. The whole story cannot exist without Nek's childhood in the Punjabi region, which comes to an abrupt end when Nek and his family are forced to leave the new Pakistan because of intolerance of their Muslim religion. Once in India, Nek starts to build his secret kingdom to rebuild a part of his part. The issue surrounding the new geographical regions can help students understanding the meaning behind the term "refugee," a term that is common in our society today. Students will love to find out that Nek's secret kingdom still exists in India. The author includes photos of Nek's secret kingdom to make this true story come alive even more. The illustrations are all intricate and beautiful representations of the culture of the Punjabi region. This book is a wonderful resource for students to learn the importance of culture and a sense of home.