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Book Review

Queen of the Falls

Aging charm-school teacher Annie Edison Taylor is determined to avoid the poorhouse. With decreased student enrollment at the school, Annie knows she needs a way to replenish her ever-dwindling supply of funds. Her plan? To go over Niagara Falls inside of a barrel! Hoping to make a profit from news coverage and public appearances, Annie hires a manager, and at the age of sixty-two, Annie becomes the first person to travel down the Falls in a barrel. Though Annie’s daring feat never earns her the fame and wealth she hoped for, it is the personal satisfaction that makes the stunt worthwhile.

A fascinating account of a little-known historical figure, Queen of the Falls is clearly well researched. Van Allsburg’s use of suspense throughout the story is especially effective. The sepia-toned illustrations seem appropriate for the early twentieth century setting, and their realistic portrayal of the events of Annie’s life serves to scaffold and support the text well. Known best for his fictional works such as The Polar Express and Jumanji, Van Allsburg’s telling of this true story is wonder-filled while remaining historically accurate.

Author
Chris Van Allsburg
Illustrator

Reviewer
Nicole Clark
Rating
Excellent
Level
Primary, Intermediate, Young Adult

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2011
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