



2018

The Red Ribbon

Karen Abbott

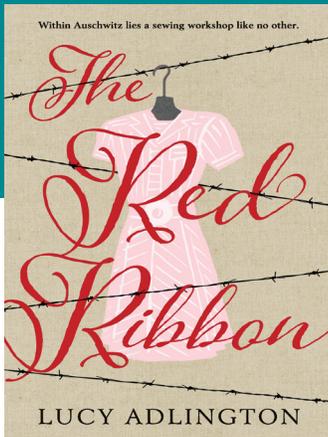
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Abbott, Karen (2018) "The Red Ribbon," *Children's Book and Media Review*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 10 , Article 42.

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Book Review

The Red Ribbon

Author

Lucy Adlington

Illustrator

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate, Young
Adult

Pages

288

Year

2018

Publisher

Candlewick Press

ISBN

9781536201048

Ella and Rose meet in the Birchwood Concentration Camp Upper Tailoring Studio, located in notorious Auschwitz. The two become fast friends. Ella is practical with strong survival instincts. Rose is more fanciful and kind. In the brutality of Auschwitz they need each other, especially when the random cruelty of a prison guard turns on Ella and ruins one of her hands. Ella can no longer sew, and the fight to survive becomes even more difficult. The girls are separated when Rose becomes too ill to work, and one day the hospital she is in is wiped out. Ella assumes that her friend has “gone up the chimneys.” Heartbroken, she makes a garment for herself as an act of determination and calls it her liberation dress—but even liberation does not guarantee safety in a world that is out of control.

Over and over again, this book reminds us that concentration camps should never exist. The brutal way that even prisoners treat one another in order to survive is almost as shocking as how the guards treat the prisoners. There is exploitation of the belongings of the dead and the skills of the living. This is the stuff of horror, and yet this is a book where beauty keeps a place in the way these two young women keep each other going. Rose’s compassion has no place in a literal fight to the death, and yet Ella, bent on survival at any cost, needs the compassion that Rose holds to keep her human. Their lives intertwine to show that it is in the things we do for each other that we find our reason for being. This is an especially good book for intermediate and young adult readers because, although the horrific circumstances are not hidden, they are not detailed, therefore adding to the story rather than detracting from it and keeping it age-appropriate.

*Contains severe violence.