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Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

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Reviewed by Anaise Francisco

The war between the Godslanders and the Tribes over which god is the real god has gone on long enough. The people of Sanctuary—those who believe in no god—come up with a plan to end the bloodshed. One member of each of the three civilizations will go together to the sacred cave to determine the truth—to determine whether there is one god, many gods, or no god. When all three members come back with the same report, there will be no more reason for war.

The leaders choose to send their children. Kyra, who is from Sanctuary, is selected leader because Eli from the Fire Tribe is too volatile, and Lillen from Godsland is too delicate. Kyra and Eli and Lillen travel to the cave. On the journey Kyra learns about the passion that Godslanders and Tribe members have for their religions. She finds this knowledge curiously peaceful and painful, but it is not until she confronts her father with her own truth that she realizes how deep religious prejudice really lies.

*Where the Truth Lies* falls just short of being a great young adult novel. The issues are pertinent to teens—What is the truth? How do I relate to my parents? What exists beyond the world they have created for me? For this reason, teens will find it an interesting and insightful book. In spite of the obviously symbolic names, Babbitt is not condescending. She presents truly difficult situations and guides the characters through them sensitively and accurately. However, only one of the characters, Kyra, is fully developed; the second youth is partially developed; and the third youth remains a mystery throughout the book. The story is believable except for the final confrontation between Kyra and her father. This scene is what the whole novel has been building toward, but rather than an emotional, passionate exchange of ideas and feelings, it is a meek, lethargic attempt by Kyra and her father to explain their feelings. It’s as though Babbitt suddenly changes her mind about what she wanted to say, but she can’t back out, so she stutters to a stop rather than charging ahead.

★★★★★
Imagine you are eighteen and about to be knighted. Your father’s sorcerer tells you of his premonition that you will be the king’s successor, and informs you that that time is not far off. Now the fear of death affects everything you do: you have to face ghosts, trolls, dragons, man-eating mermaids, the king of death, and an ogre. This is Will’s "wyrd" or calling.

Avid fantasy readers—and even those who are not—will enjoy this story. Though sometimes it is a little violent, the ideas are valid. The plot is action-packed and exciting. The characterization is descriptive, and the setting fits the storyline well.


In The Silent Storm thirteen-year-old Alyssa, a mute, confronts her physical and emotional limitations. Her parents died earlier in a devastating hurricane, and as a new hurricane approaches, Alyssa must learn to deal with her memories, because that may be the only way to escape from the shell she lives in.

The book is not intellectually challenging, but the characters and narrative are interesting enough to keep the reader wondering what comes next. Animal and nature lovers will appreciate the author’s close attention to details. The situations are contrived and some characters are stereotypical, but other characters are quite fascinating. This book is not in the "must read" category, but it is worthwhile reading.

fatherly dwarfs who work in a diamond mine, there are seven twenty-ish boys who form a rock band and who are over-ridden with hormones. Rather than pure and innocent Snow White, there is eighteen-year-old Bella, who tours Paris with the band and shares sexually intimate moments with one of the "dwarfs." She freely admits that she does not love him, but she enjoys the pleasure of noncommittal sex with no regard to consequences. Instead of a handsome prince, an American doctor saves Bella and takes her to his grandmother's castle in Scotland on the overnight train, where "tonight [Bella's] happy ending will begin."

If you enjoy fairy tales that are "modernized" and include sex, drinking, and wild nightlife, this is the book for you.


A K-4 FI PB Reviewed by Cappy Fechser

*Snow White and Rose Red* is a little-known fairy tale in which two good sisters make friends with a giant bear. The bear visits often on cold winter nights, then he leaves in the spring to protect his treasure from the wicked gnomes. While he's gone, the girls meet a grouchy gnome who keeps getting his beard caught. Each time the girls set him free, the gnome becomes more ungrateful. In the end, the bear kills the gnome, and this breaks the enchantment that made him a bear. In reality he is a king's son; he later marries Snow White, and his brother marries Rose Red.

The pictures reflect the fairy-tale quality of the story, but in a different way than Trina Schart Hyman's illustrations for *Sleeping Beauty*. In contrast to Hyman's vivid colors and detailed drawings, Spirin uses delicate lines and watercolors to give the illustrations an ethereal quality. Rosy hearts around the page numbers coincide with the story's rosy view of life. The girls are a little too perfect, "the sweetest and best children in the world, always diligent and always cheerful" (p. 5). The reader is in danger of going into sugar shock until the bear comes and adds some excitement. However, the story does convey the message that good will triumph over evil. Everyone gets what they deserve in the end.

Children will enjoy this book because of the fantasy and the happy ending. Teachers or parents could use the book to talk about good overcoming evil, but a more realistic story would get the point across better.

© © ©
Three foster children, unwanted by the wife of the good-hearted preacher who takes them in, are sent to live in a cabin for the summer. The slovenly woman who is to care for them quickly runs from the situation. Also living with the children in the cabin is the preacher’s sister, who has recently been mentally and physically handicapped by a car accident. The four of them learn to survive on their own, because they do not want to tell Father Matt of their caretaker’s flight. All of them long to be a part of a real family, and they work together through many difficulties to fulfill this longing. They experience much growth and learn to care for each other.

This book has an important theme—that of learning to understand and help others. It may help a child better understand the problems that handicapped persons and their families experience. The author has clever insights and the dialogue is interesting, but the narrative is at times slow and unrealistic.


Miranda desperately wants to trade in her thick glasses for a pair of contact lenses. Because money is “tight” in her house, she spends her summer looking for ways to earn enough money to buy the contacts. Her adventures in the job market include camp counselor, neighborhood dog walker, and supermarket clerk. Finally, just as school is about to begin again, she has enough money to buy the long-awaited contact lenses. Needless to say, she is thrilled, and her parents are proud of her industriousness. But she learns that looks are sometimes deceiving, and she makes friends with dissimilar peers.

This novel is simple reading because the plot and characters are superficial and straightforward. The characters are underdeveloped and nondescript, so readers do not identify with them. However, the story may appeal to a fifth- or sixth-grade reader.

* K-2  FI Reviewed by Lisa Brennan

Sally goes to town upside down and backwards. On her way to town she meets several silly animals who have their own silly actions. Eventually she runs into a right-side-up walking buttercup who tickles her and wakes her up. Together the whole group get to town and end up teaching everyone to walk backwards and upside down.

One of the most attractive features of this book is the bright, eye-catching purple and gold. The illustrator makes good use of these complementary colors throughout the book. For example, in one scene the fields and rooftops are golden yellow and Silly Sally wearing bright purple. The language in this book rhymes, and the rhythm just doesn’t stop. This would be a good book to use to introduce rhyme and rhythm. The catchy language in this book would appeal to young readers.

★★★★