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Stella By Starlight



Synopsis

When the Ku Klux Klan's unwelcome reappearance rattles Stella's segregated southern town, bravery battles prejudice in this New York Times bestselling Depression-era novel that soars • (The New York Times Book Review) that School Library Journal called a storytelling at its finest • in a starred review. Stella lives in the segregated South in Bumblebee, North Carolina, to be exact about it. Some stores she can go into. Some stores she can't. Some folks are right pleasant. Others are a lot less so. To Stella, it sort of evens out, and heck, the Klan hasn't bothered them for years. But one late night, later than she should ever be up, much less wandering around outside, Stella and her little brother see something they're never supposed to see, something that is the first flicker of change to come, unwelcome change by any stretch of the imagination. As Stella's community her world is upended, she decides to fight fire with fire. And she learns that ashes don't necessarily signify an end.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (57 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 9 - 13 years

Grade Level: 4 - 8

Customer Reviews

As we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. today, let's stop for a minute and applaud the valiant writers, like Sharon Draper, who write with honesty and authenticity for children and young adults. I had the amazing opportunity to speak with Draper while I was a graduate student at Clemson University.

She was real, straightforward, and humble. That's what I've always seen in her writing. From *Copper Sun* to *The Jericho Trilogy*, Draper knows what young readers want, and she delivers on every level. In *Stella by Starlight*, Draper puts us right in the middle of the action as 11-year-old Stella and her brother JoJo see the KKK gathering in the North Carolina woods at night. Burning a cross, Stella and JoJo quickly become fearful at the realization of what is happening and run to tell their parents. For the African American siblings, living in the South carries dangers on every corner. Walking down the street, as Stella recounts, is a harrowing journey, one that once came with being slapped by a Caucasian man. Stella is intelligent and quick-witted, though she struggles a little bit with getting her thoughts on paper. At the time when schools were segregated, Stella constantly questions her plight and wonders how different the white schools could be. She loves her classmates and her teacher, but the thought of always being inferior, or less valuable, hangs in the back of her mind. A trip to the candy store shows both compassion from the female, white store owner and inequality from the white kids who enter the store for candy. She simultaneously feels respected and disrespected in just a few moments.

Stella lives in a small, segregated town in Western North Carolina, right on the eve of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's election. She has to go to a different school where she's not good at writing, she's not allowed in certain stores or the local library and some white people can be downright unpleasant. But things are mostly fine for her and her family until one starry night when Stella sees a burning cross, and her once peaceful community is upended by the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan threatens the folks in her community and makes good on that threat when Stella's dad and a few other men go to town to register to vote. Things get tough, but the community relies on itself and the kindness of others and stands tall in the face of the Klan. Through everything, Stella learns that she might not be so bad at writing after all, and comes to find a real talent in herself she never knew existed. This book made me tear up on multiple occasions. Stella is such a warm, lively character, and it really hurt me to read about people being so cruel to her, her family and her friends. This is such a poignant and important novel for young people to read. I felt angry, sad, hopeless and eventually empowered by Stella's struggles and the injustices she faced. The book clips along at a great pace, and though it's geared for middle grades, it is unflinching in its depictions of the segregated South. It's never preachy and it never dumbs situations down for its audience. That's why it is such a great book for young readers just learning about segregation. Sharon M. Draper is a master storyteller. The characters are all so well written. Stella's family feels like any other family from any other period in time --- warm and loving with plenty of laughter.

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