

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEWS: War and Its Aftermath



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The waging of war on any level has huge costs in lives lost or shattered as well as having an impact on the economics and environment of the countries involved in the conflict. According to one website, <https://mic.com/articles>, there were more than 70 million casualties during World War II. But war also has human costs for the next generation, and the effects of war are often felt for decades after the weapons have been tossed aside and peace accords have been signed. Still, perhaps there is a glimmer of hope in learning from the mistakes of others so that we can learn to solve our conflicts in a peaceful manner rather than with acts of aggression. For this book review column, each reviewer chose books that covered some aspect of war, whether it be the forced relocation of individuals whose homelands are no longer friendly places for them to live, or the effects of war on children or even the emotional toll that wars leave on their survivors and civilians.

THEME: NONFICTION GEMS REVIEWS BY LESLEY COLABUCCI

Atkins, Laura. & Yogi, Stan. (2017). *Fred Korematsu speaks up*. Illus. by Yutaka Houlette. Berkeley, CA: Heyday.

Part of a series called Fighting for Justice, this book features a variety of formats to engage young people in thinking about the consequences of war. The internment of the Japanese-Americans that began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order in 1942 is still a neglected topic in schools and textbooks. This book provides a unique and detailed perspective on this injustice by sharing the story of Fred Korematsu who resisted the internment and eventually filed a suit with the ACLU. Readers get to know Korematsu through both free verse poetry capturing his personal voice and more traditional informational sections featuring archival material and a detailed timeline. These alternating styles create a balanced approach and fast-paced plot. Throughout the text of *Fred Korematsu Speaks Up*, readers are asked questions such as "Have you ever felt trapped in a place or situation?" and "If you failed at something, have you ever taken a big risk to try again?" These kinds of interactive el-

ements along with the short chapters, illustrations, and photographs add to the book's appeal. The story officially ends with Korematsu's death in 2005, but the book also includes advice for young activists, an essay from Korematsu's daughter, and copious source notes. With the heightened level of activism among young people today, *Fred Korematsu Speaks Up* is an ideal text to share in a social studies classroom or in any context where students are asking what they can do to make a difference.

Stelson, Caren Barzelay. (2016). *Sachiko: A Nagasaki bomb survivor's story*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books.

Even at just six years old, Sachiko Yasui was familiar with the hardships of war. Living in Nagasaki in 1945, Sachiko was only half a mile away from the hypocenter of the atomic bomb that the United States dropped on August 9, 1945. This nonfiction text functions as a biography of Sachiko but also captures the effects of the bomb more broadly through graphic description and historical context. The tone of the book is highly personal, and Sachiko's voice resonates with authenticity and urgency. The way her personality and perspective come through can be attributed to how well the author, Stelson, got to know her subject. Stelson conducted five extensive interviews with Sachiko and her admiration for Sachiko shapes the storytelling. Readers will be moved by Sachiko's insights into the history and the connections she makes to other leaders in forging peace, such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Stelson provides historical notes and essays alongside Sachiko's narrative, and the text is complemented with maps and photographs. The back matter includes a glossary of Japanese terms as well as supplemental material. Sharing Sachiko's story is important because it helps us understand how history affected one specific person, but it also encourages readers to question the politics of war and how violence positions enemies and allies without regard to humanity.

**THEME: 9/11
REVIEWS BY DEANNA DAY**

Baskin, Nora Raleigh. (2016). *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story*. New York, NY: Atheneum.

This easy-to-read novel chronicles the lives of four middle school children two days before the 9/11 attacks. Each character lives in a different part of the United States and is experiencing some kind of difficulty. Will is grieving the death of his father. Sergio hates his absentee dad and is skipping school. Naheed wears a headscarf to the mystification of her classmates. Aimee is attending a brand new school and doesn't have any friends. Through these children's eyes, readers experience the anguish, anxiety and ambiguity that 9/11 causes for them as well as its effects on their friends and families. With its themes of accepting others, being respectful, overcoming trauma and the power of hope, this is a must-read for teachers and children. In the last chapter the four stories intertwine on the first anniversary of the terrorists' attacks.

Nolan, Janet. (2016). *Seven and a half tons of steel*. Illus. by Thomas Gonzalez. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree.

Seven and a Half Tons of Steel describes the journey of one steel beam that is taken from the remains of the World Trade Center and is used to build the bow of the U.S.S. New York. After 9/11 metal and stone were cleared from Ground Zero. One beam was taken to a foundry in Louisiana where it was melted and poured into a mold. Then chippers, grinders, painters and polishers worked on the seven and a half tons of steel for months. Finally, the bow was taken to a New Orleans shipyard, lifted by crane and welded into place on the Navy ship. Gonzalez's watercolor, pastel and colored pencil illustrations are vibrant and lifelike. One stunning double-page spread shows a busy Manhattan street full of yellow cabs; a side mirror reflects an airplane flying low on the horizon. The back matter contains more information about the ship with measurements, speed and an explanation of the crest. This wonderful nonfiction story can be enjoyed by everyone and shows that even through devastation something new and strong can be built.

Rhodes, Jewell Parker. (2016). *Towers falling*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

The striking cover shows the before and after of 9/11—the Twin Towers are reflected in the Hudson River, and the One World Trade Center Tower emerges in the skyline. Deja and her fifth grade classmates don't understand the significance of studying the events of September 11, 2001, an event that seems far removed from their present day setting. From their elementary school window they can view Ground Zero, and their teacher encourages them to think about the

world around them and what it means to be part of a community. Deja is embarrassed that her family lives in a homeless shelter and her father is unable to keep a job. Two children, Ben and Sabeen, befriend her, and they work together to learn more about 9/11. As the story unfolds, Deja realizes that her father is suffering from PTSD because of the events that happened on that day. Jewell Parker Rhodes has created a book that expresses our American identity—strong, brave and triumphant even over acts of terrorism.

**THEME: THE EXPERIENCE OF FORCED
RELOCATION IN RECENT BOOKS FOR CHILDREN
REVIEWS BY XENIA HADJIOANNOU**

Sanna, Francesca. (2016). *The journey*. New York, NY: Flying Eye Books, an imprint of Nobrow Ltd.

In her first picture book, Italian author and illustrator Francesca Sanna relates how a family is forced to leave their war-ravaged country. Their story starts with an idyllic spread showing a family of four playing at the beach and building an elaborate sandcastle city. Their lives are shattered when a war begins and claims the father's life. Eventually, the mother and her two children flee, and readers watch as they leave more and more possessions behind, escape a close encounter with border guards, are spirited across the border by a human trafficker, and travel on a train to what will hopefully be a safe place. Narrated through a young child's perspective, the written text is sparse and naïve but also poignant, sensitively only implying some of the harshest aspects of the depicted realities. The power of the story comes in the synergy between the simple language of the written text and Sanna's colorful, stylized and highly evocative illustrations. The soft curves of the waves lapping on the beach in the first spread become menacing ink-black hands that desolate their sandcastle city as the narrator states, "The war began" (unpaged). The darkness claims the entire spread on the next page turn. The text reads, "And one day the war took my father" (unpaged), a handful of items associated with him scattered on solid black background. The book ends on a hopeful note with a surrealist illustration of the family joining migratory birds in search of a new place to call home.

Del Rizzo, Suzanne. (2016). *My beautiful birds*. Toronto, ON: Pajama Press Inc.

My Beautiful Birds was inspired by a news story Suzanne Del Rizzo encountered while searching "for resources to explain the Syrian Civil War to her own children" (unpaged). The story is narrated in first person by Sami, a young boy who is forced to flee his burning city with his family, leaving his beloved pigeons behind. When they arrive at a refugee camp, its displaced denizens strive to create a sense of normalcy by planting gardens, organizing schools, playing

soccer. But Sami, traumatized by the experience and the loss of his home and his birds, has a hard time overcoming his sadness. Heartbreakingly, when he tries to engage by painting his beautiful birds, he adds “smoky black smears from edge to edge, swallowing everything underneath” (unpaged). The turning point comes when Sami encounters and begins caring for some birds at the camp. When he paints his beautiful birds again, he uses “just one dab of black” (unpaged), and, when he spots a young newcomer whose “eyes are brimming with tears for home” (unpaged), he offers comfort. Del Rizzo’s stunning illustrations are created with polymer clay and acrylic. The clay affords them depth and splendid texture, and the acrylic paint offers a rich vibrancy, full of color and light, that counterbalances the darkness of the theme. Notable among the images are the intricately-plumed birds, along with the vibrant yellows, blushing pinks and hopeful purples of the breathtaking skies. An informative author’s note at the end discusses the Syrian refugee crisis and offers resources for further information.

Ruurs, Margriet. (2016). *Stepping stones: A refugee family’s story*. Trans. by Falah Raheem. Illus. by Ali Badr Nizar. Custer, WA: Orca Books.

Canadian children’s author Margriet Ruurs and Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr team up to create a unique book that tells the story of Rama, a fictional Syrian girl whose family is forced to leave their home and “join the river of people” (unpaged) to escape the war. Ruurs’ text, rendered in English and Arabic, is written as a narrative. It is a free verse poem that captures details of a peaceful life prior to the war, the horror of bombs falling too close to home, the difficult and dangerous journey of refugees toward Europe, and their arrival to “lands free from war, free from guns and bombs, free from fear” (unpaged). The written text offers a compelling but sensitive depiction of the Syrian refugee crisis. However, the true standout in this book is the illustrations, created using mostly stones and pebbles. Through his meticulously arranged compositions, Ali Badr has the uncanny ability to capture peace, love and comfort as well as fear, pain and sadness. His tableaus range from a serene image of an old man fishing and a vibrant rooster welcoming the day to lines of exhausted refugees weighed down by their loads, and to a huddle of bodies on a flimsy boat, some lost to the sea. An extensive foreword by Ruurs tells how the book came to be, with the last page listing links to organizations engaged in relief efforts. Readers can only wish that all refugee-receiving communities were as welcoming as those depicted in the book.

**THEME: CHILDREN IN WAR
REVIEWS BY TADAYUKI SUZUKI**

Humphreys, J. D., & Chikwanine, M. (2015). *Child soldier: When boys and girls are used in war*. Illus. by Claudia Dávila. Toronto, CA: Kids Can Press.

This graphic novel is based on Michel Chikwanine’s experiences as a child soldier after being abducted from his village when he was only five years old. His captors, members of a rebel militia in the Democratic Republic of Congo, blindfold him and force him to unknowingly shoot his best friend Kevin, who has been kidnapped as well. Michel manages to escape from the rebel camp after two weeks, but even though returns to his family, his life is never the same. He witnesses torture, destruction, and death, and he suffers heartbreak, confusion, and a great deal of anxiety over the safety of his family. After his father, a humanitarian lawyer and activist, is tortured and assassinated by his enemies, Michel, his younger sister, and his mother manage to escape to Canada. However, his older sister is unable to leave the Congo. While in school in Canada, Michel initially feels that those around him are indifferent to the violence and inhumanity in other countries. However, with encouragement from a teacher, he writes about his experiences in the Congo, eventually coming to believe that individuals working together can make positive changes in the world. His harrowing story is told in a compelling but sensitive manner. Resources included at the end of the book will help foster discussion and raise awareness about the horrors of children used in wars.

Ellis, D. (2017). *The breadwinner: A graphic novel*. Adapted from the feature film directed by Nora Twomey. Toronto, CA: Groundwood Books.

Based on the original story by Deborah Ellis (2000) and adapted from the feature film directed by Nora Twomey (2017), this graphic novel tells the story of eleven-year-old Parvana, who lives in Kabul, Afghanistan. Her family faces severe hardship after the bombing of their home and the arrest by the Taliban militia of her father, whom they suspected of possessing prohibited books and having a foreign education. To save them, Parvana disguises herself as a boy in order to work and support her family. The characters, their names, and the plot have been altered from the original book for the graphic novel, but the story is based on real events. When the rest of her family leaves for the city of Mazar to attend her older sister’s wedding, Parvana stays behind in order to be able to visit her father in prison. The book’s vivid illustrations depict the poverty and deprivation that Afghans, but especially Afghani women and children, endured under the restrictive Taliban regime. This graphic novel can serve as a cultural literacy tool, fostering lively discussions among students about the plight of women and girls living under such oppressive rulers while also demonstrating how the spirit of resistance can thrive despite hardship and loss.

McCutcheon, J., (2017). *Flowers for Sarajevo*. Illus. by Kristy Caldwell. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers.

Based on the real-life actions of Vedran Smailovic, also known as “The Cellist of Sarajevo,” this picture book is set in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo during the Balkan war.

After a 1992 mortar attack at the marketplace in Sarajevo kills twenty-two people waiting in line at a bakery, Smajilovic, a cellist with the local orchestra, plays the same tune, "Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor," in front of the bombed-out building for twenty-two consecutive days in tribute to those who died. McCutcheon describes his tribute from the point of view of Drasko, the young son of a florist at the same marketplace. When his father is sent to the battlefield in the war between the Serbs and the Croats, Drasko is left to run the shop on his own. Although saddened by the horrors of war in his own neighborhood, he is also inspired by the cellist's beautiful and haunting music. With a simple gesture, he also finds a way to bring some beauty and healing to his community, and to work for peace in the midst of war. This uplifting tale shows young readers the effects of war through the eyes of a boy not much older than they are.

Suneby, E. (2013). *Razia's ray of hope: One girl's dream of an education*. Illus. by Suana Verelst. Toronto, CA: Kids Can Press.

Based on actual events, this book tells the story of Razia, a young girl living in a small village in Afghanistan who yearned to have an education despite the fact that girls were not allowed to go to school in her country. She wishes to attend a new school for girls, the Zabuli Education Center, founded by Razia Jan, with whom she shares a first name. Razia Jan gives up her life in the U. S., where she had emigrated, and decides to return home and dedicate herself to providing educational opportunities for girls in Afghanistan. She promises to visit Razia's family and to persuade her grandfather, her parents, and her brothers to allow her to pursue her dreams of becoming educated. Razia Jan insists that, "if men are the backbone of Afghanistan, then women are the eyes of our country. Without an education, we will all be blind" (unpaged). The story explores the sacrifices that girls in Afghanistan must make in order to achieve their dreams, especially in a time of war. The author also provides startling information about education in war-torn parts of the world, and explores the reasons that 69 million school-age children around the world are not in school.

CONFLICTS ACROSS THE GLOBE REVIEWS BY BARBARA A. WARD

Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. (2017). *The war I finally won*. New York, NY: Dial Books. 2017.

In this sequel to *The War That Saved My Life* (2015), eleven-year-old Ada comes to terms with her feelings about her abusive mother and her cruel treatment of the girl when they lived in London. After a successful surgery to correct her clubfoot, Ada no longer struggles to walk, even though she limps a little bit. She and her little brother, Jamie, have settled into a country cottage with Susan Smith, their new guardian,

after Susan loses her house. Although Jamie has no problem calling Susan his mother, Ada does. In fact, she denies her feelings for Susan--no doubt complicated by her experiences with her own mother--almost to the final pages. Since the family has relocated to the estate of the Thortons, the parents of Ada's friend, Maggie, Ada has plenty of opportunity to ride her beloved pony, Butter. Nevertheless, WWII continues to make itself felt through constant bombing of nearby cities and a shortage of food supplies. When her family estate is confiscated for the war effort, Lady Thorton moves in with the Smiths, as does Ruth, a Jewish refugee who is also a talented mathematician. This arrival causes additional stress since Lady Thorton hates the Germans and mistrusts Ruth. As news comes of a heartbreaking loss, each character struggles to make sense of the world, and broker their own form of peace amid uncertainty. The characters and settings are so vividly drawn and the challenges they face so relatable that readers will be tempted to glance at a calendar to make sure they are not living during this particular era. This book does an excellent job of illustrating the effects of childhood trauma as well as showing how adults struggle with loss as Susan battles depression over Becky's death and Lady Thorton is unable to come to terms with her own grief and prejudices.

Holbrook, Sara. (2017). *The enemy: Detroit, 1954*. Honesdale, PA: Calkins Creek.

Twelve-year-old Marjorie Campbell leads a quiet life in Detroit as her father continues to recover from PTSD as the result of his own military service during WWII. There are plenty of individuals in the nation who have not forgiven those on the other side of the conflict. Xenophobia is fueled by political leaders and politicians who seem paranoid about the Russians and communism. Marjorie is just like her classmates; mistrustful of anyone or anything who is different, but a small crack in her veneer appears when her teacher assigns her to befriend a new student, Inga Scholtz, recently arrived from Canada. Inga struggles with English, and it is clear from her clothing and speech that she is actually from Germany. Marjorie wants to be kind to the girl, but she fears getting on the wrong side of her best friend, Bernadette Ferguson, who has targeted Inga for mistreatment. Thus, she too shuns Inga because of her classmates, watching silently as they belittle Inga and make fun of her culture and clothing. Things escalate once Bernadette suggests that the girls write cruel questions and answers in a slam book about Inga. Eventually Marjorie stands up for her new friend, inspired by her father's acknowledgement that the men on the other side of the conflict were not simply the enemy but humans just like him, caught up in the machinery of war. While this novel covers a time period and territory not usually explored in books for young readers, it does so through a narrator with whom most of them can relate. The inclusion of intriguing, multifaceted characters and subtle references to the economic differences among the families in Marjorie's neighborhood adds to the book's complexity, as does its examination of life after a war.

Hutton, Keely. (2017). *Soldier boy*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The stories of two boy soldiers separated by two decades have been woven together here in seamless fashion. It is not difficult to imagine what might have happened to either boy without the kindness of others. Based on the actual experiences of Ricky Richard Anywar who was taken from his Uganda village by soldiers loyal to Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army back in 1989, the main narrative follows Ricky as the fourteen-year-old boy was forced to watch as his parents and siblings, all except his older brother Patrick, were burned to death. The brothers are marched quickly through the jungle, literally eating on the run and barely consuming enough calories to stay alive. Over the two and a half years that he lives with these rebels, Ricky becomes very good at what they ask him to do, sometimes scouting and sometimes fighting on the battlefield, and he and Patrick barely acknowledge one another in order to earn their leaders' trust and escape. Their plans work, and when the time is right, they each escape. But things at home have changed, and Ricky moves on. Flash forward twenty years, and an eleven-year-old boy soldier named Samuel is plotting his next moves in order to escape from the peaceful orphanage to which he has been taken. Because readers do not realize at first that the adult patiently interacting with Samuel and working to gain his trust is Ricky, and that their experiences mesh so well, there is initially some uncertainty about what might happen next. This is not an easy book to read, prompting readers to wonder how to heal from such traumas. In Ricky's case, healing has come through his work with Friends of Orphans, a rehabilitation facility he founded. The author uses vivid language to describe Ricky's experiences, dwelling on his persistence and resilience in this moving story of survival, hope, and determination that may change the lives of many readers.

Kuntz, Doug, & Shrodes, Amy. (2017). *Lost and found cat: The true story of Kunkush's incredible journey*. Illus. by Sue Cornelison. New York, NY: Crown Books for Young Readers.

After their hometown of Mosul, Iraq, becomes increasingly unsafe due to conflicts in 2015, Sura and her five children and their beloved cat Kunkush rely on a well-paid smuggler to get them to freedom. Traveling by car, on foot through the mountains, and then in a rubber boat from Turkey to Greece, the family keeps their pet hidden the entire time. In the crush to disembark, Kunkush slips out of his broken carrier and is lost in the crowd. The family searches for him but eventually must leave, relocating in Norway. A young woman volunteering to help the refugees in the area spots the white cat, befriends him, and enlists the help of friends to find his family. Improbably, Kunkush is reunited with his family. A note from the authors provides background about their involvement in this incredible animal rescue effort and the refugee crisis that prompted the family of Kunkush and

others to seek sanctuary. Readers will be interested in tracing Kunkush's journey through the provided map and viewing the photos of his reunion with his family. Once again, readers are reminded that even animals can become casualties of war and aggressive actions in places they once called home.

Partridge, Elizabeth. (2018). *Boots on the ground: America's war in Vietnam*. Viking Books for Young Readers.

The war in Vietnam was arguably one of the most divisive conflicts in which this nation has become embroiled. Relying on interviews with eight individuals—six American soldiers, a nurse, and a refugee—Elizabeth Partridge takes readers right onto the battlefields in Southeast Asia as well as to fields of conflict closer to home for a close-up view of a war that plagued four different Presidents and cost the United States alone close to 58,000 lives. Accompanied by carefully chosen archival photographs, the stories told here are personal, riveting, and not for the faint of heart. While some men enlisted with hope and belief in keeping the world free for democracy through their service, often they became disenchanted with the administration and military leaders who seemed clueless about how to win the war. The accounts appear in chronological order, interspersed with vignettes concerning the Presidents who led the country during those times (John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford). There were also others whose views impacted the war, including civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., and musician Country Joe Fish. Readers are plunged deep into the conflict as the nation became increasingly divided about what to do about Vietnam as well as its aftermath. Interestingly, Partridge focuses on the war from the American perspective, for the most part, providing only brief background on Indochina. Instead, she examines how this nation became increasingly involved in the Southeast Asian conflicts from 1963 until its end, and then offers up a form of healing through the dedication of The Wall, the black granite memorial to those who gave their lives in Vietnam. Everything about this volume is impressive, from the haunting cover and title to the photographs, some double-page spreads, and the thorough research that underlies this volume. Even those who tend to avoid history will be mesmerized by every story included here and wonder once again about the inhumanity of humans to others.

Robinson, Jr., Anthony, & Young, Annemarie. (2017). *Young Palestinians speak: Living under occupation*. Northampton, MA: Interlink Books.

Highlighting many different young voices who speak about what life is like growing up in an occupied land, this book provides a unique perspective on living in Palestine. With a handful of photographs and some artwork and writing from children and teens living in Palestine, the book allows often-marginalized voices to be heard as they describe what it is like to grow up in an occupied land that once belonged to

their ancestors. Not only does the book provide an overview of the region's occupation and a timeline of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but it also takes readers along with the authors as they visit nine regions in the area, starting with Ramallah and ending with Burj al Luq Luq in East Jerusalem. Although some of the feelings and words expressed here are shocking and saddening, suffused with a desire for revenge against the Israelis and a desire to escape, others attest to their generation's resilience and hope. Young readers may be surprised that these boys and girls have goals interests similar to their own, but they also contend with separation walls and military checkpoints that make moving from one to another quite challenging. They draw sustenance from the handful of groups trying to provide support to this next generation, offering education, sports and opportunities for self-expression through art and writing. Clearly, this particular geographic area continues to be fraught with conflict that seems impossible to resolve, and many individuals outside of the area have taken sides without knowing much about the situation. The words of the children and teens will stay with readers long after they finish the book, leaving them to wonder how to resolve this fight for the same land in a fair way.

Stamper, Vesper. (2018). *What the night sings*. New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Sixteen-year-old Gerta has seen many deaths during her time in the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, but she is fortunate to be healthy enough to survive when the British arrive to liberate the camp. Through a series of flashbacks, readers learn how she came to be in the camp while also following her as she moves into a camp for displaced persons while pondering her next moves. There, Gerta becomes friends with Lev Goldszmit, sharing their stories and helping each other heal, but he has romantic feelings toward her, which she does not return. Because of what she has learned of the world's cruelty, she is unable to consider being married and having children. Gerta is strong and resilient, but she is just as clearly broken and damaged by the trauma she has experienced. While Lev pursues her through a series of letters, Gerta falls instead for Michah, who is enlisting volunteers to travel to Palestine, far from the places that hold such unhappy memories. However, Michah faces demons of his own, and even though their physical attraction is mutual, Gerta realizes that there might be other choices for her. Through playing the viola and trying to recover her singing voice, lost during her time in the camps, Gerta finds the courage to take a risk and make changes in her life, daring to dream that there may be joyful moments ahead. Not only is Gerta's story emotionally riveting, but the unusual illustrations, created with ink wash, white gouache, and graphite, and then toned digitally, capture her feelings and the world that surrounds her, visually representing her slow but steady journey to healing and hope and her tentative embrace of the future. No one can read this book without coming away changed in some way.

Zvi, Pnina Bat & Margie Wolfe. (2018). *The promise*. Illus. by Isabelle Cardinal. Ontario, CA: Second Story Press.

Based on a true story of sibling love and loyalty and the importance of a promise, this picture book tells how two sisters somehow survive the horrors of the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Holocaust. All Rachel and Toby have of their parents is three gold coins hidden in a shoe paste tin and the admonition to use them only when they must. When Rachel becomes ill and is moved from the barracks where the girls are staying, Toby worries that she will never come out of the infirmary alive and hatches a desperate plan to rescue her sister, a plan necessitating the precious coins. Although Toby later pays for her actions with a savage beating, the Nazi guard does not make Rachel go back to the infirmary or further punish either sister. Readers will wonder if this example of sisterly love and self-sacrifice perhaps softened the heart of the guard. The somber artwork with collage cutouts of various characters set against a bleak backdrop perfectly complements the moving story. The story becomes even more meaningful by the inclusion of photographs of the actual sisters whose story inspired this one.

CONTRIBUTORS

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