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May B.



Synopsis

"If May is a brave, stubborn fighter, the short, free-verse lines are one-two punches in this Laura Ingalls Wilder-inspired ode to the human spirit." *Kirkus Reviews*, Starred! "I've known it since last night: It's been too long to expect them to return. Something's happened. May is helping out on a neighbor's Kansas prairie homestead just until Christmas, says Pa. She wants to contribute, but it's hard to be separated from her family by 15 long, unfamiliar miles. Then the unthinkable happens: May is abandoned. Trapped in a tiny snow-covered sod house, isolated from family and neighbors, May must prepare for the oncoming winter. While fighting to survive, May's memories of her struggles with reading at school come back to haunt her. But she's determined to find her way home again. Caroline Starr Rose's fast-paced novel, written in beautiful and riveting verse, gives readers a strong new heroine to love. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (62 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #107,915 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #141 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s #244 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Stories In Verse #886 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Girls & Women

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Author Caroline Starr Rose describes her striking debut novel in verse for middle grade readers as "part Hatchet, part Little House on the Prairie, part Out of the Dust. It's a story of courage and hope." Set on the Kansas frontier, this novel tells the story of May, who's just twelve years old when her pa pulls her out of school and hires her out to a couple who've recently moved out to the

endless Kansas prairies. "I won't go," is the book's poignant first line, but of course she has no real choice, in the way of all children in that era. She'll bring in some extra money for her family, and it will just be until Christmas, her ma promises her. May hopes to be a schoolteacher one day, a surprising goal given that she has trouble learning at school. "What sort of teacher can't read out lessons?" she wonders. Yet she perseveres, bringing a book and her slate with her. When the couple she's sent to live with leave her alone in their sod house, at first she's sure they'll be returning. But when the days pass, she realizes she's been left to fend for herself, miles from any other settlers and with no help in sight. With the harsh Kansas winter coming, she must find food and fuel if she's to survive, summoning every bit of her courage and knowledge to make it through alive. I particularly enjoyed the author's use of free verse in this short novel, which is accessible to even reluctant readers. The author's poetry is particularly evocative in describing the vastness of the Kansas prairies: "grass/always grass,/in different shades and textures/like the braids in a rag rug."

Our children very often don't have an understanding of the kinds of lives people their age lived 100 or more years ago. In Caroline Starr Rose's beautiful little book, *May B.*, we see a young girl who sounds very much like my own students today in 2013. But May's life is very, very different in many ways, and I can't help but think how special it would be for our students to read this book. May's parents tell her she is going to have to travel 15 miles to live with another homesteader and his new wife. They need help around the homestead, and he is willing to pay May's parents to have her stay with them and help for the next few months. May knows it isn't permanent, but she also isn't ready to move away from her parents for so long with no way to be in contact with them. 15 miles across rough land in a horse and buggy is nothing to take lightly. To make matters worse, May is going to have to stop going to school when she moves in with them. School is hard enough for May, but with such a long time away from it, she knows she is never going to move out of the little kid side of the schoolhouse. It is embarrassing enough to have to sit with the little kids at her age because she can't read. After months away, she knows it will be worse and she will suffer the wrath of her teacher even more than she does now. At the homestead, it is clear the homesteader's wife doesn't want to be there. She doesn't intend to do any chores herself, but it seems like May's very presence bothers her. When she picks up and leaves, her new husband chases after her, leaving May behind in the homestead. May assumes they will be back, but days and days pass and no one returns.

In her debut novel, Caroline Starr Rose brings to life the struggles of living on the early American prairie--the isolation, the poverty, and the unknown. Life for May B. and her family has never been

particularly easy, so when the opportunity for May to earn a little on a neighboring farm is presented, her parents would be crazy to pass it up. So May is sent to live with the Oblingers until Christmas to help the new missus get on her feet. However, things go all wrong when Mrs. Oblinger up and leaves and Mr. Oblinger goes after her...leaving May B. to fend for herself as winter rapidly approaches. May B. is a fierce and resourceful young woman. I really enjoyed watching her develop as a character. She refuses to be ruled by her learning disability--continuing to dream of someday being a teacher despite her struggles with reading. Her determination to learn to read was also just one example of how strong she was. When she's left alone by the Oblingers, she proves incredibly resourceful when it comes to survival, despite her initial elation at not having to answer to anyone else's demands. When she finally leave the cottage in an attempt to get home, the reader senses that she truly feels that she has no choice. As someone who has always been a bit leery of novels in verse, I have to say that Ms. Rose was immensely successful in telling her story with this method. The novel lends itself to quick reading and an easy-to-imagine story. What really caught my attention is that this would be a fantastic novel to give a young person who struggles with reading. The words create vivid imagery and tell a compelling story without an overabundance of words.

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