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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 "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's 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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Age Range: 9 - 13 years

Grade Level: 4 - 8

Customer Reviews

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segregated North Carolina. One frightening night Stella and her brother Jojo witness a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan, practically in their own backyard. This meeting is the signal of trouble to come to the black community of Bumblebee. The townspeople must come together to find strength and protection to face the injustices all around them. This is an engrossing historical fiction novel with an amiable and humble heroine who does not recognize her own bravery or the power of her words. She provides inspiration not only to her fellow characters but also to readers who will relate to her and her situation. Storytelling at its finest. —Tiffany Davis, Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, NY --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

When a young girl gains confidence from her failures and strength from what her community dreads most, life delivers magic and hope. Stella Mills and her brother Jojo witness the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross late one starry night, setting off a chain reaction that leaves their entire community changed. During the Depression, North Carolina was less than hospitable for African-Americans forced to work more to earn less while being deprived of basic human rights. Through the perspective of Stella, young readers glimpse the nearly suffocating anguish that envelops this black community, illuminating the feelings associated with suppression. In a telling passage, Stella's mother attempts to comfort her: "It's gonna be all right," her mother whispered as she smoothed down Stella's hair. But Stella felt the tension in her mother's arms, and she knew that in reality, fear hugged them both." Draper expertly creates a character filled with hope, dreams and ambition in a time when such traits were dangerous for a girl of color. While the use of language honors the time period, the author is careful to avoid the phonetic quagmire that ensnares lesser writers of the period, allowing the colorful idioms to shine. A tale of the Jim Crow South that's not sugar-coated but effective, with a trustworthy narrator who opens her heart and readers' eyes. (Kirkus, *STARRED REVIEW November 15, 2014)After 11-year-old Stella and her brother witness late-night Ku Klux Klan activity, word spreads through their North Carolina town. It's 1932, and every "Negro family in Bumblebee knew the unwritten rules—they had to take care of their own problems and take care of one another. Draper (Panic) conveys a rich African-American community where life carries on and knowledge is passed along ("My mama taught me. I'm teachin' you. You will teach your daughter"), despite looming threats. While in town, Stella notes the white children's fine school building and speculates about who might be Klansmen; in her parents' backyard, spontaneous potluck celebrations chase away gloom as adults trade tall tales: "remember last summer when it got so hot we had to feed the chickens ice water to keep

them from laying hard-boiled eggs? Stella's desire to become a writer parallels her father's determination to vote. In a powerful scene, the entire black community accompanies three registered black voters to the polling location and waits silently, "Ten. Fifteen. Twenty-five minutes, until the sheriff steps aside. This compelling story brims with courage, compassion, creativity, and resilience. (Publishers Weekly, *STARRED REVIEW November 24, 2014) Eleven-year-old Stella Mills may have trouble getting words on paper for school, but she's a deep thinker, "a gemstone hiding inside a rock," her mother tells her. Even on the coldest of nights, she sneaks out of the house and writes under the starlight. Writing helps her make sense of her world; the novel's third-person point of view provides readers with a perspective wider than young Stella's, as much of life in segregated 1932 Bumblebee, North Carolina, is beyond her understanding. There's plenty of action—cross burnings, house burnings, a snakebite, a near-drowning, and a beating. But at its core this story is one of a supportive African American community facing tough times, a community acting as an "unseen river of communication that forever flows" dark and powerful, keeping an eye on its children as they walk to school, knowing who is sneaking out at night, bringing cakes and pies when folks are ill, and attending the (unexpectedly hilarious) Christmas pageant at school. If times are bad, the community makes them better, and Stella grows in its warmth and love. Even her writing gets better as she writes about things that matter—Mama, snakes, truth, hate, even the Klan. Readers will close the book knowing that Stella will turn out just fine: "Roosters never look beyond the fence. I doubt if they ever think about flying. But I do." (Horn Book Magazine January/February 2015) Coretta Scott King Award winner Draper draws inspiration from her grandmother's journal to tell the absorbing story of a young girl growing up in Depression-era, segregated North Carolina. One frightening night Stella and her brother Jojo witness a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan, practically in their own backyard. This meeting is the signal of trouble to come to the black community of Bumblebee. The townspeople must come together to find strength and protection to face the injustices all around them. This is an engrossing historical fiction novel with an amiable and humble heroine who does not recognize her own bravery or the power of her words. She provides inspiration not only to her fellow characters but also to readers who will relate to her and her situation. Storytelling at its finest. (School Library Journal, *STARRED REVIEW January 2015) "When a young girl gains confidence from her failures and strength from what her community dreads most, life delivers magic and hope. A tale of the Jim Crow South that's not sugar-coated but effective, with a trustworthy narrator who opens her heart and readers' eyes." - Kirkus Reviews, STARRED REVIEW "This compelling story

brims with courage, compassion, creativity, and resilience." - Publishers Weekly, **STARRED REVIEW**"Storytelling at its finest." - School Library Journal, **STARRED REVIEW**Sharon Draper (Out of My Mind) sets her suspenseful, hope-filled story in a small segregated North Carolina town at the time of the 1932 presidential election between Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In the opening scene, 11-year-old Stella and her eight-year-old brother, Jojo, witness a wooden cross burning on the other side of Kilkenny Pond. "Nine robed figures dressed all in white. Heads covered with softly pointed hoods," the author begins. "Who are they?" Jojo asks. "The Klan." Just saying those words made Stella's lip quiver." Draper gives young readers enough information to place the events in context. The threat is real, but the love and safety Stella finds with her family and the warm community on her side of Bumblebee, N.C., provides the antidote. The KKK, dormant for roughly three years, is showing itself because of the upcoming election. Only Stella's father, Pastor Patton and Mr. Spencer are brave enough to register to vote. And when the KKK strikes back by burning down the Spencers' home, the entire community comes to their aid--including a few white families. Draper balances the larger cultural forces at play with the daily routines of doing chores, attending school and going to church. The author shows Stella's maturity and strength as she comes through again and again for her family and her neighbors. At the same time, Stella crafts her writing, alone and in private, trying to improve and also as a way to air her fears. Her sense of honesty and justice make her a child with whom all readers can identify. --Jennifer M. Brown, children's editor, Shelf Awareness Discover: A suspenseful, hope-filled story of a courageous 11-year-old in a racially divided town on the eve of the 1932 election. (Shelf Awareness for Readers, **STARRED REVIEW** January 13, 2015)"Her sense of honesty and justice make her a child with whom all readers can identify." - Shelf Awareness, **STARRED REVIEW**Written as a fictional tribute to her grandmother, Draper has crafted a historical tale that addresses racial inequalities of the Depression era. Ten-year-old Stella resides in the small (imagined) town of Bumblebee, North Carolina, with her mother, father, and younger brother Jojo. Stella struggles with school and attempts to improve her writing skills by keeping a diary. Stella sneaks out at night to write about her life and her observations of the changing world around her small African American community. In the opening chapter, Stella and Jojo are out at night and witness nefarious activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Attempts by African American males of voting age to register to vote in the upcoming presidential election are met with opposition and violence. With the knowledge that the Ku Klux Klan is active in their community, Stella, her family, and other members of their community band together to stand strong against the injustices of racism. Draper's characterization of Bumblebee's African American

residents is well done and readers will enjoy their interactions. A warm and homespun quality to the story balances the serious and life-threatening situations encountered throughout the book. Draper offsets the hateful attitudes of some of the white community members with compassionate, non-racist residents of Bumblebee. Stella forges a bond with Paulette Packard, the daughter of the reprehensible member of the Ku Klux Klan, Dr. Packard. Stella realizes that even seemingly perfect appearances can have a dark side. Although the primary appeal for this book will be younger readers and the middle school audience, older readers would benefit from and enjoy this slim story of historical note.

—Adrienne Amborski. Written for middle school readers, this historical story about Stella and her family is well executed. Readers will learn about struggles that Stella and her family face during the Great Depression. Older teens may think the book is juvenile, but it still provides a good story. 4Q, 3P.

—Gwen Amborski, Teen Reviewer. (VOYA February 2015)

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Excellent book, however, I feel that the young heroine would have been much more cautious in real life re: the statements she made to white people as she MUST have seen many examples of brutality on the part of whites by the time she had reached her age. She was extraordinarily heroic by diving into the night waters.

I'm a 30 + year old reader, and I enjoyed this well-written, inspiring book. This is the type of book that every middle-school child should read, teaching young minds the privilege all Americans have to vote and why we must educate ourselves to vote responsibly. Great story!

Love love love. History and fun, well written. My 11 year old read this book and loved it. It was a good spring read. It has great imagery and one can picture the time and place. Very nice 5 th grade read.

I like this book. It's like learning history through the eyes of a child. On thing I also feel that despite the hardship and discrimination in the past, family structure, support, and bonding seemed much stronger than today. Friends were more real and sincere.

This book is incredibly realistic and made me feel like I was there. Sharon Draper is a wonderful author who tells a poignant story of family, community, and personal growth amid an atmosphere of great danger! I love this book!!

Beautifully written for a younger audience (kids age 10-12). It handles the very difficult subject matter of racism during the 1930's in a way that is truthful yet still appropriate for young children.

Purchased this for my 12-year-old daughter. She loved the book. I've read Sharon Draper's Hazelwood High trilogy myself and I purchased the audio version of the trilogy to use in class and my students loved it. This is a good author.

Amazing book with wonderful moral lessons! Sharon Draper is a fabulous author and this book is perfect for fifth and sixth graders -- older kids, too. Especially in these times, it's important for kids to understand what is happening and what's happened in the past.

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