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44 Hours Or Strike!



Synopsis

The Toronto Dressmakersâ™ Strike of 1931 brings young Jewish sisters Sophie and Rose together in a fight for better working conditions, decent wages, and for their union. They are faced with unexpected and sometimes violent barriers, and they quickly find that a strike is more than just a march. In the midst of anti-Semitism and the Great Depression, they come together to try to make a lasting change.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 15 years

Grade Level: 6 - 8

Customer Reviews

Fourteen-year-old Sophie and her older sister Rose are the wage earners in their family and must picket during the 1931 Toronto Dressmakerâ™s Strike. Before reading this novel, I was afraid it might be too instructional, but the descriptive prose and images of Toronto made the setting real rather than textbook. 44 Hours or Strike! is a simple, well-researched account of the strike that is accessible to middle grade readers. The novel provides opportunities for middle readersâ™ to understand labor issues, put themselves in the charactersâ™ shoes and meet historical figures that played a role in the labor movement. I appreciated that issues other than workersâ™ rights were raised: police bias, treatment of inmates, hospital accessibility and intercultural relationships. Of all the issues discussed, I was wondered why there was no discussion of the long hours and workweek infringing on the Sabbath. As a teacher, I like that these issues are mentioned, but not resolved (what a great way to stimulate a class discussion). Often writerâ™s for a middle-grade audience

would shy away from such complex issues. Clearly, Anne Dublin respects her readers. I wish Sophie had been more psychologically dynamicâ”clearly the family went through a lot, but as the novel wrapped up I did not feel the growth I would expect. I wanted more emotional depth. Also, the novel ended suddenly, I wanted more resolution (I know a idyllic resolution for this book is not possible, but I needed more of a falling action to realize the end was near). I would recommend this novel as a companion to a social studies class for 3rd-5th grades. (Source: eARC from NetGalley)

Welcome to the war. Although the war was being played out in another country, its effects were being felt everywhere including Canada. The year is 1931 and many females were being forced out of school to help with the familyâ”™s finances and/or to help with the war efforts by working. Rose dropped out of school a few years ago when the situation at home demanded that money was needed and schooling would have to wait. Now with their papa deceased and their mama ill, Sophie would also be working at the factory to bring in money to help with the familyâ”™s finances. The conditions at their factory are awful and the workers have decided to go on strike. The strike brings new issues and situations to the family as Rose is arrested and put into jail. The sisters are separated and the strike takes its toll on everyone involved. The family income dwindles as the strike continues. Sophie tries to make contact with her sister but there are limitations to what she can accomplish and Rose, strong independent Rose is locked behind bars. Their hands are tied because of the war and also because of the strike, so now these women will have to rely upon each other for strength. I enjoyed the story for the information that it provided to me about this time period and I believe this would make a great addition to a schoolâ”™s library. The novelâ”™s ability to address this issue with the information it provided without additional topics and without overwhelming the reader with too much information makes it a good choice. I didnâ”™t get all emotional with this novel as there were no deep drawn-out emotions within the novel. The photographs inside the novel were helpful and I thought they helped stabilize the story and brought connections to the events occurring within the story. I received a copy of the novel from NetGalley and Second Story Press in exchange for an honest opinion.

In 1931, during the Great Depression, fourteen year old Sophie Abramson and her sixteen year old sister Rose are garment workers, who join the Toronto Dressmakersâ”™ Strike, supported by their union, to demand for better working conditions, shorter hours and decent wages. Itâ”™s the middle of winter and the girlsâ”™ family as the other workers on strike are already impoverished and desperate to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. To add to the sistersâ”™ woes,

mistrust and resentment toward immigrants is rampant and many people blame them for their poverty and unemployment. When Rose is imprisoned for a month for her action on the picket line and her mother is hospitalized, Sophie is left on her own to continue the fight for a cause she believes is valid but is leaving her with nothing.44 Hours or Strike is a novella that uses the story of the girlsâ™ struggles to mask a documentary like report of the events and the conditions of the time. Photographs with explanations lends to the documentary style. But the girlsâ™ hardships as well as the prejudices and conditions of the time hit the reader hard, making anyone reading the novella appreciate what the strikers did for future generations of workers.Reviewed for Historical Novels Society

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