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Silent Observer



Synopsis

"I was born, like my seven brothers and sisters, in a house atop a hill overlooking lovely Bras d'Or Lake." So begins Christy MacKinnon's story of life as a little girl in 19th-century Nova Scotia, Canada. Through wonderful images created with her own words and her watercolors, she tells of a simple, charming life on the family farm; of learning with her father, the master of her town's one-room schoolhouse; and of her eventual travel to Halifax to attend a "special" school. As with many children in the 1800s, Christy became deaf after a "seige of whooping cough, " a sickness common then, which she barely survived. Silent Observer opens to young readers a world rarely seen today. They will be thrilled by her family's ride in a horse-drawn sleigh over a frozen northern lake, and her close encounters with a noisy bull and a "gentleman" ram. Children and adults alike will warm to her cheerful memories of the simple pleasure of playing in a flower-filled field with her brothers and sisters. They will discover, too, that young Christy crossed paths with many vital figures of the day, beginning with frequent visits by Alexander Graham Bell, and later with a momentous meeting with Helen Keller. Silent Observer is a delightful memoir told as it was seen through the eyes of a lively child. It is also a meaningful record of life for a deaf child and her family in the far reaches of Canada at the end of an era. Silent Observer is a beautiful, sensitive story that is sure to be enjoyed by everyone.

Book Information

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Age Range: 5 - 9 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 4

Customer Reviews

Grade 2-4-MacKinnon, born in 1889 and deaf since the age of two, worked as an artist until her death in 1981. Her niece later found a package of artwork and notes and published them in this memoir. The text reads like a diary, lending authenticity and charm to MacKinnon's anecdotal stories of growing up in 19th-century Nova Scotia. Her watercolor illustrations are colorful and heavily outlined; some are more detailed than others. Their unpolished look reinforces the personal nature of the book. However, the intended audience for this title is unclear. The text is quite long, and the subject matter would be best appreciated by upper-elementary students, but the format is that of a picture book. A unique offering, but one with limited appeal. Christine A. Moesch, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, NY Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Ages 5-9. A personal view of growing up on a Cape Breton farm at the end of the nineteenth century. Illustrated with line-and-watercolor artwork, this first-person memoir starts when MacKinnon contracted whooping cough and lost her hearing at age two. The narrative continues through her first term at a boarding school in Halifax when she was 13. MacKinnon's experiences included the death of her mother, the realization that she was deaf, her father's remarriage, and her difficult adjustment to boarding school. While both the drawing and the writing are awkward at times, this memoir, culled after her death from MacKinnon's diaries and artwork, has a certain charm. Aside from the story itself, which includes the child's meeting Alexander Graham Bell and Helen Keller, as well as some amusing anecdotes of farm life, the book may be useful to teachers presenting units on nineteenth-century life or on deafness. Carolyn Phelan

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