

Coming Of Age: Thrasher Magee Discovers There Is More To Manhood Than Battle

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Review

COMING OF AGE

Thrasher Magee discovers there is more to manhood than battle

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Bartoletti, Susan *No Man's Land: A Young Soldier's Story*. Blue Sky/Scholastic, ISBN 059038371X

In **No Man's Land: A Young Soldier's Story**, Susan Bartoletti introduces us to Thrasher Magee, a boy on the brink of manhood. His very name describes the way he lives his life. Nothing comes easy for Thrasher. In his chores and in his relationships, he plods along -- always doubting his abilities, always feeling inadequate. After a particularly painful episode with his father, Thrasher feels the only way to redeem himself is to join the Confederate Army and prove that he is a man.

Bartoletti weaves fact and fiction, so that Thrasher's coming-of-age story is really a chronicle of the thousands of boys like him, North and South. Thrasher and his mess mates tell the story of all the boys who fought. Thrasher yearns to prove himself to be a man. Baylor longs for adventure and excitement. Wade joins to protect his home and family. Goodloe serves because it is the right thing to do. And Tim, whose true story is revealed to us only in the end, takes up the cause of the right of self-determination.

We follow the Okefinokee Rifles as they train for the glory of battle with the optimism of the young. And through their eyes we become a silent member of their company. We feel their spirits rise and fall as they await their baptism by fire. We enjoy the hijinks and comradery of camp life. We experience the tedium of picket guard duty. We trudge through the mud and the dust in seemingly endless marches. We feel the anger that the horrors of war engender in those who live it and the satisfaction that one feels in duty well done. We see the boys grow and change.

And in the book's most moving scene, we see the boys meet the enemy off the field of battle, banding together in an act of mercy. And in that act of mercy, the boys and we begin to understand a sobering fact. In other circumstances, those whom we see as enemies could be friends.

In the end, Thrasher and his mess mates "see the elephant" and are forever changed. The lessons they learn are timeless: the value of family and friendship, the power of the human spirit, and the importance of duty and honor. In **No Man's Land**, Susan Bartoletti presents us with these immutable human truths and helps us to see the Civil War through the microcosm of the Okefinokee Rifles. a

Meg Galante-DeAngelis of the University of Connecticut School of Family Studies has done historical research on the lives of children and families during the Civil War.