

Naming the Stones: A Moment in Civil War History Witnessed by a New England Boy

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Review

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Stites, Clara *Naming the Stones: A Moment in Civil War History Witnessed by a New England Boy*. Spinner Publications, Inc., \$7.95 ISBN 932027725

From whaling ships to war ships

A child's perspective of this warfare transformation

Clara Stites' earlier books for young readers are set in the California of the 1800s. With this novel, she shifts her setting to New Bedford, MA during the early months of the Civil War. **Naming the Stones** tells the story of the stone fleet from the perspective of a twelve-year-old boy. We learn how the great whaling ships are transformed into tools of war: stripped down, filled with stone, and sent to blockade the Charleston harbor. This evocative story mirrors the transformation and loss of the whaling ships in the disintegration of the narrator's father and in the narrator's realization of the complexity of war. As the whaling ships come to symbolize both waste and patriotism, we are forced to consider war's physical and emotional price.

This ambitious story strikes an uneasy balance between efficiency and complex themes, and might well be developed into a longer novel. The narrator observes on page 23 that the battles of the Civil War seem too distant to be real, and ultimately we are tantalized by a desire for the narrator to be more than an observer of these stirring events. But while the narrator is allowed to avoid the implications of what he observes, the book could certainly serve as a useful impetus for discussions of the ironies of war. Although recommended for ages 10 and up, the book seems eminently suitable for younger audiences.

The text is enhanced by beautiful illustrations. Cindy Davis does a superb job of evoking a sense of historical period and emotional intensity.

Julie Pfeiffer teaches British literature and children's literature at Hollins University. She is the editor of Children's Literature.

