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Review: Worth

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Worth

By A. J. LaFaye

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2004

DESCRIPTION:

As he is hurriedly helping his father get hay in the barn to preserve it from the coming storm, Nathaniel makes a miscue, and the horses move forward, causing his leg to be smashed. Nate and his father, Gabe each blames himself, but regardless of whose fault the accident is, the farming must go on. To fill in the gap, Gabe goes to town and comes home with John Worth, a child from the passing Orphan Train. Because he has not discussed his decision with his wife, Nate's mother is furious and to say the least, unreceptive, to John. Nate feels that John has taken his place with his father because even though hailing from New York City, John is physically able to do the work that Nate can no longer manage with his less-than-whole leg. Gabe, for his part, fails to look at his son or talk directly to him, when, before the accident, he had discussed all his farming decisions with Nate. Of all strange interventions, it is the reading of Greek myths that begins to make a difference in this fractured family, and eventually helps to prevent an all-out range war with Nate's family at the center.

CRITIQUE:

LaFaye juggles several difficult subjects in this title with aplomb. Readers learn about the Range Wars and how they created personal hardships for families. For those who are handicapped in some way, Nate offers the role of a well-rounded hero because he faces pain at home and ridicule at school, but he continues to try to do what he believes is the right thing. Perhaps the resolution of Nate's reading deficiency at school is a bit too pat, but it does offer adventure, and the crossing of cultural lines and readers will enjoy the boy-girl solution. Father-son issues are also resolved, eventually, and even John finds a home, finally, with acceptance by all family members. Caution: there is occasional profanity, since this is a story that deals with strong emotions of both son and father. Also, there are some definite doubts about how God fits into both Nate's handicap and John's loss of family.

RELATED SUBJECTS:

1800's, Agriculture, America, Broken bones, Chores, Cross-cultural relationships, Death, Death of parent, Disabilities, Disappointment, Diversity, Family, Family relationships, Farm life, Father-son relationships, Fear, Friendship, Greek myths, Grief, Handicaps, Heroes, Horses, Mother-son relationships, Nebraska, New York(NY), Orphan trains, Orphans, Range Wars, Reading, Reading aloud, School, Sisters, Thunder

CHARACTER THEMES:

Community, Competition, Cooperation, Coping, Courage, Dependability, Duty, Encouragement, Ethnic pride, Family love, Friendship, Gratitude, Hope, Initiative, Jealousy, Knowledge, Leadership, Maturity, Neighborliness, Obedience, Patience, Resolve, Respect, Self-respect, Sharing, Spunk, Survival (Physical), Trustworthiness, Work ethic

AWARDS:

Arizona Young Readers Award, Best Children's Book of the Year, *Booklist* Editor's Choice: Books for Youth, *Booklist* Top 10 Historical Fiction for Youth, California Young Reader Medal, Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, Golden Archer Award (WI), Golden Sower Award (NE), Grand Canyon Reader Award (AZ), Indian Paintbrush Book Award (WY), Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, Mark Twain Award (MO), Massachusetts Children's Book Award, Nebraska Book Award, Pennsylvania Young Readers' Choice Award, Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, Sunshine State Young Reader's Award (FL), Virginia Readers' Choice Award, VOYA Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers, Wisconsin Battle of the Books