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Review: Elsie's Bird

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Yolen, Jane, *Elsie's Bird*. Illustrated by David Small. Philomel, 2010. ISBN: 9780399252921. (Ages 4-8)

Description:

Elsie was born in Boston, but when her mother died; her father left their familiar surroundings to begin over again on the wide Nebraska prairies. With only her pet canary Timmy Tune to keep her company, Elsie has difficulty adjusting to her new surroundings. She is overcome with homesickness. One day when her father has gone to town for supplies, Timmy's cage door is accidentally left open and he escapes. Plunging into the tall grass to find her beloved pet, Elsie hears the songs of the prairie birds that she had not noticed before. For the first time, she begins to feel a kinship with her new home. As Timmy flies back to Elsie, her father returns bringing with him a bantam rooster, some hens and a hound dog. Suddenly Elsie finds herself with more friends to love.

Critique:

Children who have been torn from familiar territory and transported to strange new locations by the move of their parents, will readily identify with Elsie. Her homesickness seems magnified by the emptiness of the seemingly endless prairie. Depending on her pet canary for companionship, she learns that its friendship means all the more when given the choice of whether to return. From the panorama of the Boston harbor to the wide sweep of the open prairie, David Small's light touch and attention to detail are the perfect complement to this touching story.

Related Subjects: Birds, Death of parent, Father-daughter relationships, Grief, Pets, Prairies, Survival

Character themes: Appreciation of nature, Independence, **Inspiration**