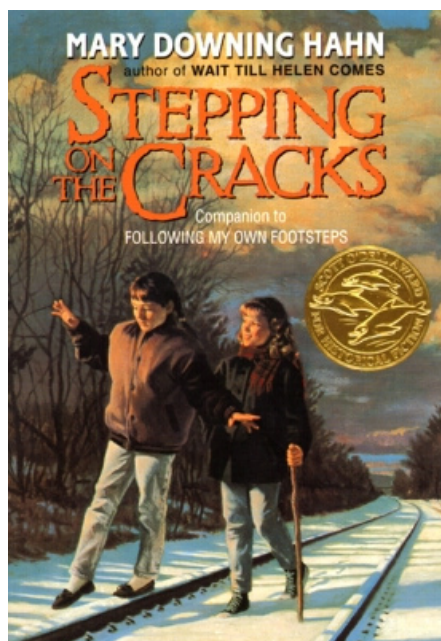




Stepping on the Cracks

Mary Downing Hahn

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In 1944, when her brother is overseas fighting in World War II, eleven-year-old Margaret changes her mind about the school bully, Gordy, after she discovers he is hiding his own brother, a deserter. "There is plenty of action and page-turning suspense (and) much to ponder and reflect on as well." -- School Library Journal, starred review

Stepping on the Cracks Details

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From Reader Review Stepping on the Cracks for online ebook

Meghan says

I hate this book!

Peony Minassian says

The reason why I chose the book Stepping on the Cracks was because I never read historical fiction before, and reading a book that involved World War II seemed very fascinating. The book is about a girl named Margaret, and her friend Elizabeth. Both of their brothers are battling the war because of Hitler, and while their overseas at war, Margaret and Elizabeth have their own war at home with the biggest bully, Gordy. My favorite quote from the story would be "Together we walked the rest of the way home". The reason why I chose this quote was because it showed how even though Margaret and Elizabeth both went through much trouble, their friendship was never lost and that's what mattered the most. I really liked the way the author wrote the book because she made a historical fiction book sound very interesting. The first sentence of the book sounded so intriguing and so did the rest of the book. One possible theme for this story would be that people should never judge others right away. For example, both of the friends judged Gordy as being this evil mean person. But when they found out about his story, they both felt pity for him and always wanted to help out in some way. I would recommend this book to anyone who has had family members lost in a battle. This book will be very interesting and a great way to connect.

Kayla O says

September book review
Stepping on the Cracks
By: Mary Downing Hahn

As Hitler's war rages on, two best friends Margaret and Elizabeth are having their own struggles with their least favorite person ever. The girls despise Gordy Smith. He would always go about bullying them and making them miserable. Elizabeth was the more brave and daring friend who always had a smart comeback for anything that was said to her. While Margaret preferred to stay out of harm's way, and didn't like to argue with people. Although, they all have one thing in common. Each kid has at least one sibling fighting in the war. One day everything changes. The girls find out a secret of Gordy's that changes their whole perspective on him. They all encounter many difficult decisions and obstacles along the way, but will everything they do be enough?

The theme of this book is to never judge someone by how they may seem. At the beginning of the book Margaret and Elizabeth thought of Gordy as a bully. Once they found out about Gordy's secret it changed the girls' whole point of view on him. Gordy wasn't so bad after all. The girls realized they shouldn't conclude something about someone unless they know what they're really going through.

Sara Andrews says

World War II is in full force. While Elizabeth and Margret are at home in a small town, College Hill, their brothers are off at war. The underlying mood of the entire story is how people are trying to get by and interact in everyday life while their loved ones are oversea.

I like how this book is written from the perspective of everyday life here in the United States during WWII. Even though the girls' brothers are fighting in a real war, they too are fighting their own against the town bully, Gordy. Only to find out several of Gordy's family secrets. This book takes you on a roller-coaster of emotions.

I would use this book either in a fifth or sixth grade classroom. This would be a book that I would prefer read aloud to my students. There are many different themes to explore and discuss: abuse, bullying, family secrets, history, patriotism, friendship, and WWII. I would still do a lot of activities centering around this book. For example: I would have students write a reflection journal. Students could research this time period in our history and find out what it actually meant to ration food and what patriotism looked like on the home front. Discuss hard topics such as bullying and abuse and solutions.

This is one of my favorite books and I would love to incorporate it into my classroom.

Nancy says

This book brought back a lot of childhood memories for me. The girls in this story would sing, "Step on a crack, and break Hitler's back." We used to sing, Step on a crack, and break your mother's back, and then we would try very hard not to step on a crack. We would sing, Whistle while you work, Hitler is a jerk, etc.

I related to the fear of having someone in the military. My older brother was in the Navy during the Korean conflict, starting in 1950. In this story we hear about loved ones fighting in World War II, and the pain of loved ones when one of them was killed.

There is a group of bullies in this story. We learn that one has a very abusive father. The people in this story didn't get involved when someone was abusing their family members. No days is a crime not to report abuse, if you are a teacher or in the medical professions.

There is one young man, who deserted the army, and is helped by others.

There are many things in this story to show us what life was like during that war. Good book!

Marion says

I had to read this in fourth grade. It was me and a bunch of girls and all we did when we read it was giggle and cry, we all bonded. It was so sad once the book was over because our little group was over. I remember it very fondly and would definitely recommend it.

Joey Garcia says

This book definitely made me almost shed a couple of tears. Judging by the cover, it doesn't seem like a book

that'd make you cry right? Well the description can probably tell you why.

*****SPOILER ALERT, (duh..)*****

This book made me curious every second of it, I would not want to stop reading this in my ELA class in 6th grade! The teacher would tell me to put my book down and I'd get angry because this book made me sitting at the edge of my seat. Honestly, I had no idea that this book would make me cry. This book was taken place during World War II. Elizabeth's brother was in the war. She also has a friend named Margret. Gordy is the enemy of both of them and hide a big secret from Elizabeth and Margret. Gordy is taking care of a deserter who was in the war but escaped cause he got sick.

That part of the story probably goes on throughout the whole book. This is definitely a book for people who like suspense books, when Elizabeth's parents told her that her brother dies during a war, I really almost shed a tear. Books where you're not expecting an ending like that really make me close the book slowly thinking "Did that just happen?"

I see this book a lot in the library and it always makes me want to read it over and over again until I'm tired of it. This is the first book I read my Mary Downing Hahn, and wow I have to say that ever since that, I've loved her books ever since. The mysterious that lie within this book can make people (like me) WAITING for more. I love a good book like this that can hold mysteries but make a person cry.

I really don't remember a lot of books I read, but this'll probably be on my mind 24/7, although it may not seem like it but whenever I'm reading a book full of mysteries, this book comes to mind. At the most, I'd rate this book a 10! I like the idea of the name if this book because I think by now everyone should know the game "step on the cracks, break your mothers back" yeah, well this book is "step on the cracks, break Hitlers back". Before I read this, I had NO IDEA I'd love it this much.

Katharine says

I loved this book so much in 4th grade, that I volunteered to "adopt" its library shelf during recess on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I kept the "H" shelf straight and in order so that this book would be safe and well cared for. I have no idea how many times I read it, I'm sure it was alot...

Demi Purdy says

This book, written by one of my favorite authors, is a historical fiction book taking place in the later years of World War II. Set in 1944, this book tells the story of Margaret, whose brother, Jimmy, is out fighting in the war. Her friend, Elizabeth, has a brother who is fighting as well, but they aren't scared for them as they believe that they well come home safely. But they have their own problems: the school bully, Gordy, who refuses to leave them alone. However, the girls later stumble upon Gordy's secret, and that is that he is harboring his older brother, Stuart, who ran away from the battlefield. On top of that, Gordy's father is also an abusive alcoholic, so Stuart coming home isn't an option. But with this, Margaret and Elizabeth start to have a change in mind on the war and start to be more concerned for their brother's in the front lines and wonder just how things will turn out for the war, for Gordy, and for themselves. I feel that this is a good way to show what a young girl who lived during WWII with a close relative on the battlefield would be represented and could be read to see such. It also fits because Ms. Hahn grew up during WWII. I suggest this would be more for those in Middle to High school, especially when studying WWII. But I gave it this rating

because I didn't find it as engaging as other books by this author.

Jessica McMahon says

Some people are mean for a reason, don't judge them so quickly. This was a lesson Margret didn't know she would learn. She and her best friend, the daring Elizabeth, live in 1944, both of their older brothers were drafted to serve in World War II. Along with the hard times, they also have to live near the a horrible neighborhood bully named Gordy. He's rude, sexist, and won't hesitate to hurt someone. At first, it seems average- Margret and Elizabeth wanted to get revenge on Gordy. (Elizabeth was really the only one, Margret tagged along to prove she wasn't a baby.) But they find a horrible secret- and have a hard time deciding whether to tell or not. What will happen? Will they tell? Will they be punished? And most importantly, will someone die?

Oh many this book was awesome. I have read my fair share of World War II books, and this was one of my favorites. Thespian characters Margret and Elizabeth remind me *exactly* of my mom and her best friend growing up. All those stories she told me gives me an idea of Margret's life outside of the story they are telling us. It's personal and hits close to home. And now, some words about Gordy: what kind of name is Gordy anyway? And man, it is hard to sympathize with this kid. He was RUDE. I can see why, though. (view spoiler) I recommend this book to anyone dying for some suspense, some sadness, and someone who wants to know what growing up during World War II was like.

Jenna says

Best historical fiction book I've ever read. The amazing plot line makes you want to read it all night long

Gunnar E says

So good i love 9/11 and WWII.

Aileen Antillon says

Would you like your brother to be in Hitlers war? yea.....mhmmm I wouldn't because he would be in a risk. He could die, a war is very dangerous to be in you don't know what might happen. The genre of this book is historical fiction you could say because i dont think anyone could be in Hitlers war because hes not alive anymore, maybe in the past when he was alive but trust me no one can be in Hitlers war. My opinion in this book is that i really really liked it because it had lots of action in it, and it also talked about how Hitlers war was detail by detail.

The story gets it's title from a simple childhood game of "step on a crack, and break your mother's back". In this book, it's "step on a crack, break Hitler's back. This book is mostly about a thing called how Margarets brothers is in Hitlers war. Hes in a huge risk he could die(mann!!I wouldn't even want to be in Hitlers war). Margaret always knows when hes in the war because in her bedroom she has a gold star hanging on her

window. When that gold star moves it means that her brother is fighting in Hitler's war. This book is person vs. person because the big conflict on the book is Margaret's brother is in risk of dying.

The main character's main problem is that Margaret doesn't know what can happen to her brother in the war. She's afraid he could die or he can be alive. No one knows but Hitler. Also Margaret needs to face Gordy the school bully, she can only face it on her own. A little by little he will understand why Margaret can be rude at times too. Gordy is mean to Margaret because all the stuff that happens in his family (he says it's complicated).

*****spoiler Alert*****

I was surprised that Margaret's brother survived in Hitler's war because her brother kept explaining how the war was very dangerous to be in. Gordy is actually very surprised because Gordy stopped his attitude and his bullying. Margaret is just trying to have a good childhood and have fun. But not until her brother comes back safe and sound from the war. She can't have fun without her older brother because they're too attached to each other.

I rate this book a 4 because I really liked it it was very interesting. I feel like it was a lesson always treat your siblings good because you don't know what might happen in the future. NEVER TAKE ANYONE FOR GRANTED!!!!!! I recommend this book to my siblings lol because they could learn something new like never treat your sister bad well literally don't treat anyone bad. Treat someone the way you want to be treated. Now that I told you a bit about this book, it would be better if you read the whole book!! Now that I read this book makes me not want to be mean to my siblings lol.

Claudia says

Hahn is writing here about a time she remembers...war years on the home front. Storybook Dolls, nasty brown oxford shoes (I had a pair 10 years later -- hated them!!). A child's flawed understanding of war and its consequences. This is her most reflective book, and her most thoughtful.

Often there are nasty kids, ghosts who cannot rest. Often there is redemption and growth and insights.

Here, there's only kids trying to live their lives when the adults in their lives are so preoccupied by WWII. Margaret and Elizabeth are best friends and natural enemies of Gordy, the braggart, the bully...the boy hiding too many secrets for a child.

Patriotism, the inability of the world to accept any objections to the war, the questions about secret facilities...all bring a taste of the paranoia of war. The girls think if they can step on enough cracks, they can break Hitler's back, and then Margaret's big brother Jimmy can come home.

The girls end up blundering into a huge secret and the consequences will certainly shatter many lives.

Big questions are explored: what do we owe our country in wartime? What if we choose NOT to kill? What is the nature of courage? How do we ultimately save each other?

And can Elizabeth and Margaret really help Gordy? Will he let them?

Rants and Bants says

Note: I rant and rave quite a bit in this review. BUT, the other two books are quite good actually. It was just this one in particular that was hardly bearable, probably because instead of it being in Gordy's perspective, it was in Margaret's, and thus we got to suffer more from Elizabeth, a truly obnoxious brat. We also only saw Gordy from the outside rather than through his own eyes, and thus the sympathy that Stu deserved, which made Gordy far more likeable in the next two books. So keep in mind, while this book was just not done well due to how it was set up, the series overall is actually pretty good.

Plot: While historical fiction isn't normally my thing, I find that it can really be so interesting looking at something from the perspective of a different time period. I've always been fascinated by seeing stories from kids' or teens' perspectives during the 60s or 70s or 80s, and even further back, like in this case World War 2. I think the part that mesmerized me the most was when Margaret and Elizabeth were in the hut in the woods and started seeing it snow for the first time that winter. It's something pretty much every kid can relate to, even though this was more than half a century ago. The mood in the book was very striking too. How everyone in the town, from the neighborhood streets to the school, was sort of on edge regarding the war. You could just feel the tension in the air.

When you think about it, kids haven't changed THAT much. Sure, technological advancements and other things have had a major impact on the course of how they live their lives, but I just hate it so much when people say "kids are getting dumber", dissing any generation that comes before them when, clearly, yours was just as dumb as ours. It does show in this book...the kids in this book are probably at this point old enough to be our grandparents or maybe even great-grandparents, but...they were just as spoiled and selfish as any kid today. Sorry to break it to you, but has it really changed?

Characters:

-Margaret Baker-She was okay enough for a main character. She was quiet and had a hard time standing up for herself. I really wish she had, though. It's kind of a mix for me because I like the quiet kind of characters that aren't all special or popular or whatnot, but I also want them to be somewhat active and move the story along. And...I wanted her to shut both Elizabeth and Gordy up. That didn't happen, unfortunately. That, along with her initial harsh and unwarranted reaction to Stuart, are the two big criticisms I have for her. She seemed like a sweet girl, but she just wasn't enough to make up for everything else in the book for me that was bad.

-Elizabeth Crawford-Oh god Jesus...this bitch is a BULLY, not a friend. I nearly threw up during the part where she actually got mad and yelled at Margaret for daring to stand up to her and say "no" to something she didn't want to do, and calling her a coward and whatnot. And then instead of telling her to shut the fuck up, Margaret actually *apologizes* and GIVES IN. When she did that, I was just like...what the actual hell am I reading? That's not how a friendship works...that's not how friends treat each other. No, just no. I couldn't even handle it. How DO you handle it? It was just sick and disturbing.

It's also funny Elizabeth calls her the "coward" for not wanting to do something when Elizabeth is the one

who needs Margaret to tag along with her to do something stupid in the first place. If Elizabeth thinks she's such a big boss badass, why doesn't she *go and do it on her own*?

There were even several parts where Margaret keeps saying something like, "Even though I didn't want to..." or "I was scared and didn't want to go, but..." or "Wishing I could just stay here in the treehouse..." Dude. These are all signs that maybe you shouldn't be friends with this person. Come on. How is that a friendship? HOW? Half the time you're not even HAPPY around said person. They boss you around and exact power over you and force you to do things against your own will and make you do things that you don't feel comfortable with? We have a term for that: It's called "peer pressure." This is not a friendship. It's PEER PRESSURE. It's not a friendship because in a friendship you are EQUALS. People always talk about this sort of thing with relationships...but never friendships. I wonder why.

If I had a "friend" like Elizabeth, I'd dump a bucket of icy cold water on her head, and then proceed to smack the bitch across her face. I'd NEVER let someone treat me like that. She's a witch. I find it disturbing that her and Margaret are considered "friends" in any way.

And then the stuff she said to Stuart...you know what? I don't care that she's twelve. I really don't. I tried so hard to overlook her, and the others for that matter, because of their age and I know kids say things and are ignorant and don't know better or whatever, but I just...can't excuse it. I just don't care how old you are. Your parents are also to blame.

-Gordy Smith- Jerk. Luckily the author knows this, which is more than I can say for others, but I still really needed someone to put him in his place and that never happened. Him, Margaret's mother, and Elizabeth are the reason why this book is getting such a low score. I honestly was expecting to give it 4 or maybe even 5 stars. This just proves that you NEED to reread books, especially books from when you were much younger, because your views may change. I think they laid on the whole "he's got a hard home life so cut him some slack" WAAAAAY too thick. I mean, no one said it in those exact words...but you could tell that was the tone of the entire thing. I mean, even GROWN ADULTS let him speak to them badly. Which is why I find it hilarious that everyone today is always like, "Oh boo hoo, kids today have no respect." Ahem...kids today? *Today*, you say? What about kids back then? They were exactly the same, in case you haven't noticed. NOTHING has changed.

And he was SO ungrateful to Elizabeth and Margaret when they agreed to help Stuart. And then he blatantly humiliated Margaret in front of everyone, including two grown adults who didn't do anything to help, by blaming her for something her MOTHER did, not her. So now it's okay to blame people for what their parents do, even if they have no control over it??? I can't even. That part just nauseated me because NO ONE said anything about it.

Like Elizabeth, I guess he *sort of* redeemed himself a little at the end when he gave Margaret his sympathies for her brother, but it wasn't enough. So her brother had to die in order for him to be nice to her? Eh??? Does that seem a little...fucked up??? And still, nothing is ever said about how he acted before.

The thing is, I think people who haven't experienced bullying before will have no problem with a character being mistreated and misrepresented as a poor kid even though he hurts other kids. Because he's "misunderstood." And to an extent, I can sort of see the appeal to it...when it's done correctly. As in, when someone finally shuts him or her down and they learn a valuable lesson from it all—that you have to be nice to people no matter WHAT you've been through, or you won't get any niceness or sympathies or respect back. I'm all for the redemption kind of character thing, because it's nice to see someone grow and become a good person. It really is. Seeing a softer side to someone who first started as really mean or rough around the edges is very rewarding. However...that's not what happens with Gordy in this book. He stays more or less the same. He goes through little to no change. This is really important to acknowledge. Like I said, maybe for people who have never experienced bullying before, that's okay. But as someone who knows what it's

like to be preyed upon, to be afraid to go to school, to be scared right next to somebody, I don't take too kindly to it. I think it's really important for people who don't go through bullying to understand what it's like for those of us that do, because you are really, really lucky that you didn't have to suffer through that as a kid.

-Mrs. Baker (Margaret's mother)-I pretty much lost my shit when she started saying all those things about Stuart towards the end. I'd thought she was one of the more kinder characters in the book until then. But then she just turned into a raving self-righteous **bitch** hiding behind the popular disguise of a poor mother who just lost her son. Stop. Just stop it. Stop playing the victim card just because you are ONE OF A GAZILLION MOTHERS OUT THERE who have lost their children. You are not the only one, and you certainly have no right to take it out on an innocent young man who was forced to go and sacrifice himself for a bunch of ungrateful shits like you. I hate how so many parents out there, both in fiction and real life (and it's usually mothers...call me sexist, but it's true) act like just because they've lost a child, they suddenly gain the right to start taking it out on everyone else around them who had nothing to do with it. Newsflash, Mrs. Baker: Stuart isn't the fucking reason Jimmy died. He didn't kill Jimmy. Him deserting the army isn't what fucking killed Jimmy. Jimmy would've died regardless. Got it? Why are you even making it about Jimmy? I hate peoples' attitudes in general towards deserters, because you know what? It's usually people who never have to worry about going to war anyway, who live in first world countries with mainly first world problems. That's the reason why I wouldn't judge a deserter, because I'm not in their position and have absolutely no idea what they're going through or what kind of fear they must be feeling to be forced into something like this. The three characters who bitched about it in this book are Elizabeth, Margaret, and Margaret's mother. Well it must be so EASY for you to criticize when you get to sit in your cozy living room with your radio and magazines. I mean it must be SO EASY for you to bitch and complain when you get a full hot meal at dinnertime. It must be SO FUCKING EASY to feel so above it all when you get to sleep in your room at night with only rain to bother you rather than having to sleep in a tent and worrying about enemy gunshots coming your way. Yeah. I bet you just know everything there is to know about war when you will NEVER be forced to actually be a part of it. You have the luxury of staying in a safe area and only HEARING about it. I mean, let's look at the obvious here: It's quite clear no one in this quiet peaceful little town wouldn't know the true serious horrors of war when their children run around pretending to play soldiers all the time. There's nothing wrong with it necessarily, but if they did know what it was really like, they probably wouldn't be joking around with it. I'm just saying.

It's not even like we see any other soldier HIMSELF talk about Stuart and their feelings on what he did. Not that it would change my opinion regardless, but it just makes it so much harder for me to really care when the only people complaining are two sixth grade girls whose biggest worries in life are homework, and a housewife whose biggest chore is probably watering the plants and drying the dishes. Sorry I just can't imagine them suffering nearly to the extent of what Stuart went through.

And then her parents PUNISH HER for helping a man to survive in the cold, unforgiving weather in the woods. What? WHAT?? You're trying to teach your kids to not have any compassion for anybody? That no matter what, the glory of war and being a war hero is more important than anything? That it is never okay to try to see somebody else's perspective on something and to instead always go with what everybody else tells you? GREAT PARENTING. And of course, Elizabeth being the dipshit that she is, blames Margaret when her stupid mother tells her parents and gets her grounded too. Stupid bitch.

I'd like to think that in reality, she's just mad that Stuart had the guts to do what she couldn't—he protected his family and sacrificed himself in the process. While MRS. BAKER knew what the fuck was going on and didn't do a damn thing. She wants to call someone a coward...well, she should talk. I'm so glad Margaret stood up to her, and even called her out when she slapped her by comparing her to Gordy's father. I think the comparison was quite fair. To get angry at your daughter for being devastated at losing her brother and wanting him back...just...wow.

-**Barbara and Stuart** are really the only nice characters in here, but even they killed me when they let Gordy push them around, especially Barbara. She's just way too nice. I'm so happy Stuart proposed to her at the end though, and I hope they have a long and happy life together. I support them, big time.

Dawn says

I want to be very clear that I feel this book is inappropriate for a younger child without adult guidance. I would suggest pre-reading. That being said this book has not shied away from a lot of important issues that are often skirted around in children's books.

It took me a long time to decide I liked this book. Margaret is a pushover. She is afraid of everything. Her bully of a best friend pressures her into doing whatever she wants. They are disobedient too. Their brothers are overseas fighting in WWII. Their parents are so absorbed in the war they seem ineffectual and absent. There is a nasty gang of boys, lead by Gordy, who bully the girls. Although this is a bleak cast of characters, as the book progresses we watch Margaret attempt to speak for herself and it forces you as a reader to question what constitutes true friendship. I found Margaret's fears although frustrating, effectively make a reader relate to her, as we all want to be liked and fear rejection in some form or another. We learn that Gordy and his family are being abused by his father and that in this time period unless his mother reported it there was nothing the police could do.

One of Gordy's brothers is overseas, but the girls discover that Gordy has been hiding another brother who has deserted. He's sick and in need of help, but it is illegal to help a deserter. The reader also has to question their own morality and begin to see that there are grey areas where we must rely on our own conscience even if we're afraid. Through the girls interaction with Gordy and his family we begin to see that there is a time to stand up to fight to protect others, which we see very clearly when the adults do nothing to save the children from an abusive man. We also see the opposite lesson coming through in the waste of the war.

Despite the unpleasant nature of the girls' relationship and the poor adult roll models in this book there is a mountain of opportunity for discussion here. Peer pressure, abuse and the morality of war being among the primary ones.

It has a number of bad words and references to pinup girls being sexy.

Julie Lobb says

I love reading historical fiction books about World War II. This one is interesting because it is set in the United States during the war. This book is different than Mary Downing Hahn's other books. No scary ghosts! But the characters are likeable, even the school bully who has a secret.

Elly Berge says

This book was a good new view on World War II. Connecting the families overseas and the fighting of wars in and around towns, even if it was the School Bully. Mary Downing Hahn writing style creates a different view on society in this time. The view of two girls that are not really included in the war, but they are

affected by it. This book was a good mix of strong english and historical concepts. It was very intriguing and will get a readers emotions running.

Bree Ervin says

I read this book slowly over a month, it kept getting interrupted by other books.

I don't think that was the fault of this book however - just one of those times in life.

I've been a Mary Downing Hahn fan since I was a kid, and my daughters both love her books now.

This one is great in many ways, it touches on a lot of really important issues that kids are facing as well as reminding us of a time in our history when we often look outward at what was happening in the world and forget to look at what was happening right here at home.

This has been the year of WWII books for me, I believe this is the 6th WWII book I have read this year.

It's a great MG introduction to those times. Its focus is right here at home and there is little to no talk of what Hitler was actually up to, or how everyone was involved. It only looks at the war effort as it affected the daily lives of Americans - the rationing, the sacrifices, the idea that of course everyone would send their sons to battle the great evil that was Hitler.

A very enjoyable book and I wish I'd been able to read it all in one go.

Brent Haremza says

This books was amazing! I read this book back in 8th grade and loved it. I just recently got the chance to recall this book for a college class i'm in and tell them about it. I just wish Mary Downing Hahn would write the sequel to this. Thank you so much for writing this book.
