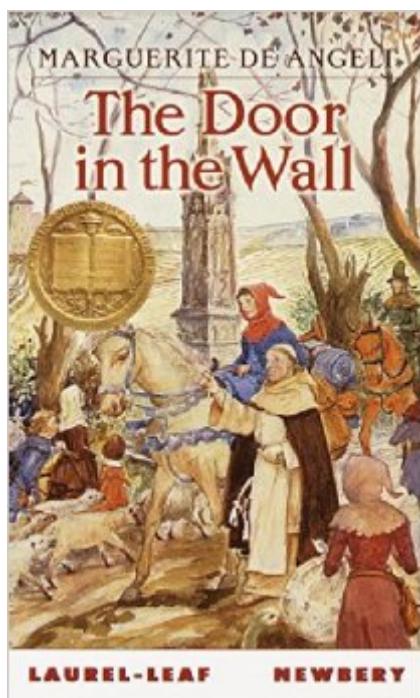


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The Door In The Wall



Synopsis

Set in the fourteenth century, the classic story of one boy's personal heroism when he loses the use of his legs.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 990L (What's this?)

Mass Market Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Laurel Leaf (August 10, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0440227798

ISBN-13: 978-0440227793

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 0.4 x 6.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (212 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #8,019 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 inÂ Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Medieval #4 inÂ Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Special Needs #4 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Medieval

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

As an elementary school librarian, I think it's informative to read all the reviews found here. It can be summed up that readers either like or dislike this Newbery Award winning book. There is no middle ground. However, one should pay attention to the many negative reviews by "bored" students. It's my opinion that these students were probably not sufficiently prepared to read this short--but somewhat challenging--story. If a teacher just passes this book out, or says, "Go read a Newbery book," then I don't blame them for yawning. I think a student's interest level would increase if they had some sense of the language, as well as an understanding of this fascinating historical period. A quick search on the Internet reveals an interesting array of lesson plans, background materials and quizzes. There are also some excellent--and easy--books that provide helpful background information, such as David Macaulay's "Castle" and "Cathedral;" Jonathan Hunt's "Illuminations;" Aliki's "A Medieval Feast;" or Joe Lasker's "A Tournament of Knights." There are many more good titles available. It would be beneficial if teachers would pre-read this book and make a list of the unfamiliar terms and the older forms of speech used throughout. (Better yet, it would be wonderful if

the publisher would produce an edition with a glossary!) Knowing the language will open many "doors in the wall" for most students. I've recently been doing some research on what books are considered classics for elementary age students, and "A Door in the Wall," shows up on just about every list I've seen. It is a true classic in many ways.

I remember reading this book ages ago, and I hated. I thought it dated and dull, with its archaic language and details about medieval life. Now, after years of studying mythology, including the Prose Edda, I can better appreciate it. It's not a GREAT book, but it is a good one. Robin is the son of a knight, destined to become a knight one day himself - until he falls ill and loses the use of his legs. The plague is ravaging medieval England, and it claims several of the servants who were caring for him. Robin is rescued by a kindly monk, Brother Luke, who takes the crippled boy to a local monastary and patiently cares for him there. Under Luke's guidance, Robin learns how to swim, read, whittle, and how to become a humbler person rather than the rather snobby noble boy that he once was. But all is not well in England. Robin must "open a door in the wall" -- the walls that hemmed him in when he lost the use of his legs -- and discover that you don't necessarily have to be a knight to serve your king and country. This is not a 9-12 book. Oh, not because of any objectionable content or attitudes, but simply because the, majority of 9-12 children will be bored witless by it. It's better suited to young adults who can handle the gradual pacing, softened archaic language (a fair number of twills, thous, amisses, and arts) and virtually actionless plot. As a result, "Door in the Wall" resembles a slice of real life from the POV of a crippled boy rather than a fictional story. Such gruesome details as the plague and the violence of war are smudged out, by the way. It seems a lot longer than its 120 pages. Ignore the silly cover art, the characters aren't like that at all; the interior illustrations are soft and realistic.

When I read the synopsis on the book jacket, I assumed that Robin, the protagonist, was a lot like Whitey of the movie "Boys Town", to be taught the right path by Brother Luke, who I deduced was the equivalent of Father Flanagan. I was wrong. Robin wasn't rebellious at all. This is one reason why the story does not bump along as much as it flows. (Its lack of conflict keeps it from bumping, but the author's lovely prose keeps it flowing.) The setting is romanticized. There is nothing about the disgusting sounds, smells, habits, and parasites of the Middle Ages. If I had not read Cushman's "Catherine Called Birdy" (another good book) first, I would have thought that Medieval England was clean, pretty, quaint--and only a little muddy when it rained. Though things are protrayed as more lovely than they really were, I have to say that the attention to detail--from the handwritten

manuscripts to a small town's market day--was amazing. I felt as if someone had tossed me several hundred years back in time and that Robin, Brother Luke, and John-go-in-the-Wynd were my guides who explained everything to me. It was a fascinating journey, though it took place in an armchair. (The original illustrations help a lot.) The main characters are as real and as idealized as the setting is. What I mean is that they are three-dimensional and realistic, but also that they have halos and little wings. They are really, really good. To some, they may be boring; but if there were more people like them in the world, we would all be much happier. Brother Luke was a wonderful, patient and understanding mentor to young Robin. He always seemed to know exactly what to do to help Robin to maturity.

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