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Erika's Story



Synopsis

It is the winter of 1944. In Nazi-occupied Europe, a Jewish couple realize their fate is sealed and make a heart-rending decision so that their infant daughter might live. Ruth Vander Zee's elegant narration and Roberto Innocenti's searing and beautiful illustrations combine to capture the fear, love, and sadness of a Holocaust survivor's story.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 1 - 3

Customer Reviews

Grade 3 Up-Vander Zee narrates this true story in the voice of Erika, a woman she encountered in a German village, who, as a blanket-wrapped infant, was thrown from a cattle car bound for a concentration camp in 1944. ("On her way to death, my mother threw me to life.") A German woman risked her own life to raise Erika, who eventually married and had children of her own. ("Today my tree once again has roots.") The spare, eloquent text perfectly complements Innocenti's gray and beige photo-realistic illustrations that show haunting, finely detailed, sterile winter scenes of train cars, tracks, and cold brick-and-stone buildings surrounded by barbed wire. On other pages, a white baby carriage and the small pink bundle catch the eye. Only the contemporary opening scene and the final postwar spread are in full color. Compelling and powerful in its simplicity, Erika's story proves that determination, hope, and goodness can overcome evil. Stars are important to this story. Yellow Stars of David are visible on the people's clothing and the symbol appears on every page, separating Erika's thoughts. She mentions God's biblical promise to Abraham that his people "would be as many as the stars in the heavens," and that "six million of those stars fell between 1933 and

1945." The large die-cut yellow pentagram on the front cover is a jarring exception to the carefully crafted text and illustrations. This poignant story of survival deserves a wide audience. Susan Scheps, Shaker Heights Public Library, OH Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Gr. 3-6. "My mother threw me from the train." A Jewish woman in Germany today tells how, as an infant, she survived the Holocaust after she was thrown from a train on its way to the camps in 1944 and was taken in and raised by a village woman. The survivor imagines her parents in the ghetto and transports. Did they hold her close and kiss her before throwing her away to save her life? Innocenti, who did the Holocaust picture book *Rose Blanche* (1991), dramatizes the horror in amazingly detailed photo-like illustrations with an overlay of surreal imagery: a small baby carriage stands on the platform as the Jews are being loaded into the cattle cars; wrapped in bright pink, a baby flies through the air as the train hurtles through pastoral landscapes. The clear, tiny details dramatize both the fragility and the endurance of the infant survivor, as well as the bizarre calm of the "normal" world. Is the woman's story true? The experience is certainly known to have happened to some babies. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Love the pictures, so life like.

My students enjoyed this book as a read aloud.

This book is offered as a children's book; however, it is fairly serious for children. It is a great adult book! Response to my order was very fast and book was speedily shipped.

Great book to use with Holocaust unit.

My beautiful and brilliant daughter is ERIKA, with a K. A very good true story I read at the holocaust museum in DC 10 years ago. I bought it to read it again and give to my daughter.

We should have been made to fall in love with Erika or have more story details to make it interesting for a child to read. Too much has to be inferred for a young child.

A great story. It is appropriate for young and old. However, for the younger set, it is better to read this to them. Remember, many people do not know about this sorrowful event in history. Some background is necessary. I do not think it appropriate for very young children to be exposed to the horrors of the Holocaust, they have to be eased into the topic: this book serves such a purpose. In middle school, students (may) study this unit when they do WW2. In my middle school, teaching the Holocaust is mandatory. In co-operation with faculty, I (school librarian) work hard to make sure our students receive comprehensive teaching on this topic by providing resources in the library: inviting survivors or their children to speak to the students and teaching classes on the topic. I had the privilege of meeting the author. She just smiled when I ask her if it was her story. She graciously gave me the star from the book. [The space for the star on the cover is depressed and a star can actually fit in there.] I do not know if all books come with it - my copy did not, but the star she gave me fits perfectly in that slot.]

I have to tell you that this was one of the most deeply moving children's books I have ever read. I have read this work a number of times since it was first published in 2003 and you would think that the impact would lessen; it has not. This is the true story of Erika's, told in her own words and recorded by the author after a chance meeting with Erika on the streets in Rothenburg, Germany. The starkness of the prose, the matter of fact way Erika tells her story adds to the stunning effect to which the illustrations by Roberto Innocenti has set the stage for. Erika, born in 1944, was an infant of only a few months old, and in her words: "I was born sometime in 1944. I do not know my birth date. I do not know my birth name. I do not know in what city or country I was born. I do not know if I had brothers or sisters. What I do know is that when I was just a few months old, I was saved from the Holocaust." Erika's entire family, including the infant herself, was loaded onto cattle cars and was being transported to one of the extermination camps. Erika's mother apparently knew that something very, very bad was about to happen. When the death train slowed down in a small town, she and her husband were able to take the infant, wrapped in blankets, and throw her from the train where she landed on a patch of grass. A kindly lady rescued her, raised and educated her...cared for her. The parents of this little girl were of course never heard from again. Can you begin to imagine the pain those parents must have felt? The matter of fact way in which Erika tells her story is simple, touching and terrifying all at the same time. When you mix this simply told story with the wonderful illustrations, most of which are in black and white with just a touch of color here and there, then you have a very powerful story. As to the illustrations, think Chris Van Allsburg and the impact of his art...Innocenti has the same touch. "It was once said that my people would be as many as the

stars in heaven. Six million of those stars fell between 1933 and 1945. Every star was one of my people whose life was savaged and whose family tree was torn apart. Today, my tree once again has roots."There are only 18 pages to this story...scant text, but the message it brings, the emotions it stirs, well, I have read 500 page novels that did not do as well. This work is ideal to use in the classroom and indeed should be a part of every school library. I can think of no work available which will tweak the interest of young students more than this one. The adult present had better be prepared to answer a lot of questions, because questions there will be. There is horrible sadness in this story, yet at the same time the reader is left with a sense of hope. Don Blankenship The Ozarks

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