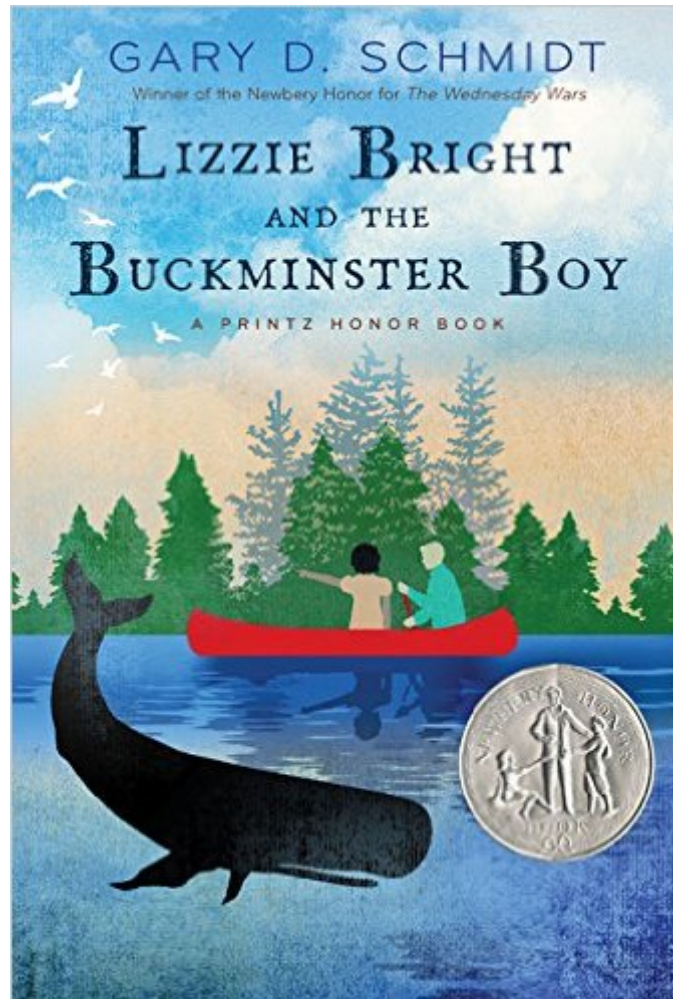


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Lizzie Bright And The Buckminster Boy



Synopsis

It only takes a few hours for Turner Buckminster to start hating Phippsburg, Maine. No one in town will let him forget that he's a minister's son, even if he doesn't act like one. But then he meets Lizzie Bright Griffin, a smart and sassy girl from a poor nearby island community founded by former slaves. Despite his father's-and the town's-disapproval of their friendship, Turner spends time with Lizzie, and it opens up a whole new world to him, filled with the mystery and wonder of Maine's rocky coast. The two soon discover that the town elders, along with Turner's father, want to force the people to leave Lizzie's island so that Phippsburg can start a lucrative tourist trade there. Turner gets caught up in a spiral of disasters that alter his life-but also lead him to new levels of acceptance and maturity. This sensitively written historical novel, based on the true story of a community's destruction, highlights a unique friendship during a time of change. Author's note.

Book Information

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Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

Customer Reviews

"From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved."--Charles Darwin, THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES"Like angels appearing in the sky, whales are proof of God."--Cynthia Rylant, THE WHALESBecause it is based upon a series of true, race-related events in Maine during the early 1900s, LIZZIE BRIGHT AND THE BUCKMINSTER BOY might make you think of Karen Hesse's WITNESS. Several of the "good guy"

characters--Mrs. Carr and the elder Mrs. Hurd, for example--have a charm reminiscent of the idiosyncratic folk in *BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE*. But, because of the depth of the evil behind the tragic real events upon which the fictional story of Lizzie and Turner is built, the feelings of despair and anger with which we're left evoke memories of such books as *MISSISSIPPI TRIAL*, 1955 and *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*. The enchanting Lizzie Bright Griffin, a girl of great strength and few words, belongs to the youngest of many generations of African Americans who have called Malaga Island home. "Lizzie held close against her grandfather as the people of Malaga Island came out from the pine woods, gathered around their preacher on the shore to hear what had been said. Before they turned, Lizzie felt her grandfather ebb as though his soul were passing out of him, the way the last waves of a falling tide pass into still air and are gone. "She took a deep breath, and she wasn't just breathing in the air. She breathed in the waves, the sea grass, the pines, the pale lichens on the granite, the sweet shimmering of the pebbles dragged back and forth in the surf, the fish hawk diving to the waves, the dolphin jumping out of them."She would not ebb.

Having finally finished, "Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy", I see now that the 2005 Newbery year was one filled with books for older child readers. Whether those readers are into racism or autism, the subject matter of the winners was particularly complex and mature. And in none of these winners is the subject more mature than in "Lizzie Bright". Basing this tale on the true events that occurred on Malaga Island, just off the coast of Maine, the story is a thoughtful look at the meaning of racism, friendship, human connection, and loss. It's not going to strike the kids who read it as a cheery devil-may-care book. But its magnificent writing keeps it from becoming another "Kira-kira" sob-fest. In any case, it's the kind of story that'll give you reason enough to stop, think, and consider. According to Turner Buckminster's calculations, he was in his new home of Phippsburg, Maine for approximately fifteen minutes shy of six hours when he realized that, "he didn't know how much longer he could stand it". For one thing, he's the son of the town's new minister. And when you're the minister's son you're expected to be the soul of virtue. Turner's not a bad kid, but he has a heck of a way of getting into trouble. It's only when he escapes to the seacoast and meets Lizzie Bright Griffin that things start to look up. Lizzie's one of the black people living on the tiny island of Malaga, just off the coast of Phippsburg. It's a poor community (this is 1912, after all), but they get by. Unfortunately, the town's been losing money and it seems the Buckminsters have been hired by the city's fathers to help them in their goal of ridding Malaga of its inhabitants so as to set it up as a tourism site.

Turner Buckminster, late of Boston, is the son of First Congregational's new pastor and doesn't feel welcome in Phippsburg, Maine. When the townies taunt him for his poor batting skills at an impromptu baseball game, he fantasizes about "lighting out for the Territories." Then he meets Lizzie Bright Griffin, an independent Malaga Island girl who improves his baseball, takes him rowing on the bay, and introduces him to the wonders of her island and its natural surroundings. Just off the coast of Phippsburg, her island is an historically black community that the town citizens plan to forcibly remove-in order to make way for the tourist trade. The geographical (the wild Maine coast) and historical (circa 1910) settings of this novel are integral components of the story; Turner and his father discuss Darwin's Origin of the Species, while Lizzie shares her island refuge with her friend. As a punishment for fighting with local bullies, Turner is forced to play the organ for Mrs. Cobb, a crotchety old neighbor. Later, he and Lizzie form an unusual friendship with her. The inhabitants of Malaga Island are forced to leave, and things become desperate for Lizzie when her grandfather dies-she is sent to an institution for the feeble-minded in faraway Pownal. (Anyone who doesn't "fit in" is sent there by the Phippsburg deacons.) When Turner inherits the old woman's house and attempts to move Lizzie into it, tensions escalate, climaxing in a Buckminster family tragedy. In the background of this turmoil, there is the beauty of the natural world, illustrated by the majesty of the gray whales that cruise offshore, the wheeling gulls overhead, and the bracing fragrance of the coastal pines. Schmidt creates sensitive and believable characters that are capable of unexpected acts.

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