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The Mighty Miss Malone



Synopsis

"We are a family on a journey to a place called wonderful" is the motto of Deza Malone's family. Deza is the smartest girl in her class in Gary, Indiana, singled out by teachers for a special path in life. But it's 1936 and the Great Depression has hit Gary hard, and there are no jobs for black men. When her beloved father leaves to find work, Deza, Mother, and her older brother, Jimmie, go in search of him, and end up in a Hooverville outside Flint, Michigan. Jimmie's beautiful voice inspires him to leave the camp to be a performer, while Deza and Mother find a new home, and cling to the hope that they will find Father. The twists and turns of their story reveal the devastation of the Depression and prove that Deza truly is the Mighty Miss Malone.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (115 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #61,072 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #106 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s #170 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American #2508 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life

Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

"Gang aft a-gley," This unique phrase was used throughout the book, *The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Deza Malone's teacher Mrs. Needham most fittingly describes the phrase, "No matter how well you think something through, many times schemes simply will not work out. They will go astray." The Malones were a family with their own motto. Everyone embarks on a journey to find a place and life they've always dreamed to have. The Malones had that dream within their motto. They hoped to adventure to a place where money, jobs, and material objects were not

of concern. A place where this transcendent family could live freely, a place called Wonderful. Unfortunately, Deza and the Malone family experience more gang aft a-gley than Wonderful. Despite the struggle and hardships of being an African American family during the Depression they accepted what was dealt to them and fought through the toughest time in history. Curtis uses the Malone family to paint a picture of 1930's during the worldwide economic depression. A time when jobs were nearly impossible to obtain and families were often broken when men had to leave to find work. The economies decline forced many people to become homeless and live their life in poverty. Curtis' writing goes into such detail that you can actually smell the stench from the boxcars that the family used as a means of transportation to find their father. When Deza had to part from her best friend, I felt genuinely sad and could understand her heartache. It was easy to experience the same feeling as the people in crowd did when they listened to Jimmie sing. I could close my eyes and hear the smooth melody of his angelic voice. I cringed when I read about the bugs crawling out of the oatmeal box that Deza was having for breakfast.

The Mighty Miss Malone by Christopher Paul Curtis is created from the mention of a young girl in a Hooverville in Curtis's previous acclaimed novel for middle-graders, Bud Not Buddy. While I relished the idea to discover more about this plucky, young lady, I was ultimately rather disappointed in her inability to step up and be the hero of her own story. Deza is an incredibly bright girl growing up in Gary, Indiana, where she is heralded by her teachers as being "the one student who could make a real contribution." She is a member of a loving family, who joyfully cares for one another despite their growing poverty and absence of a job for her father. When tragedy knocks on the Malone's door step, the family dynamic is shaken and Mr. Malone feels he has no choice but to leave the home and look else where for employment. Thus begins a journey of Hoovervilles, prejudice, and separation for the remainder of the Malone's as they travel to find Deza's father and a stable living environment. What drew me to this book (besides being an immense fan of the author's previous work) was the idea of a young, African-American girl of this particular time period (the age of the Hooverville) using her wit and intelligence to save her family. Deza is likable and funny from the very beginning and you can't help but root for her. And as the story goes on, you can't help but be disappointed that Curtis doesn't give her more opportunities to be the hero. SPOILER ALERT!! I anticipated the moment when Deza's intelligence would rescue her family and pull them back together, but I never was really able to enjoy that moment. In reality, it is Deza's brother that does the rescuing, and despite his absence from the storyline for a period, he quickly steals the reins from her.

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