



The Right Moment; Final Victory; Blitz Boys; Blood and Ice

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NewsChoice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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These short stories stand alone but together form a set of fast-reads that explores the different experiences of four lads in four different countries during the Second World War. The style and format is an obvious attempt to produce eventful books that will both appeal to boys and gently create the safe stimulus of serial reading. Each text has the interesting addition of wider reading suggested by the author and three of them begin with a brief, useful authorial note.

Belbin's boy hero, Jean, is forced to leave Paris and head for the country, where he realises that all is not as black and white as it seems. When one cousin is in the Maquis and another is dangerously in love with a German officer at the local barracks, Jean is required to make uncomfortable choices and decisions.

Final Victory is set in Germany in the last ranting days of Hitler's rule. The main protagonist is Jurgen Wolf, a twelve-year-old indoctrinated into the ways of Hitler Youth. He fatally believes in his Führer and fails to comprehend that he is being used as a pawn in a game that has been lost by the old men and definitely cannot be won by children like Jurgen.

Newbery's Londoner, Ronnie, combs the blitzed buildings when he should be at school and lives satisfyingly on his wits. Then he meets a strange boy, Dusty, and finds himself questioning what the nature of courage really is, concluding that it comes in many forms and one of them is the fortitude shown by his parents, who defy Hitler just by surviving in the war-torn capital.

Finally the set moves to the Siege of Leningrad, where Vanya is recruited to take a highly symbolic, sacred cross out of the city, through German lines and thence to Stalin himself. The deprivations and desperation of war come across most

strongly in this tale, with some heart-rending descriptions as the boy makes his perilous journey. This one also seems to show most poignantly the way a whole generation was blighted and manipulated by power hungry leaders, thinking only of themselves.

These books will certainly teach a lot about the War but gain extra integrity from the moral issues that they present and explore. Well worth adding to Library order lists and slipping into the hands of Humanities secondary teachers concerned about boys' progress.

Running Order:

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