

Stella by Starlight

Sharon M. Draper

Reviewed by Rachel Johnson, 42

Teen Star Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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It's 1932 and Stella Mills is 11 years old, in the 5th grade. She lives in Bumblebee, North Carolina with her mother, father, and younger brother JoJo. Bumblebee is a segregated town where Stella cannot go to the same schools as whites, she can only enter through the front door of a few stores, and she cannot visit the library. One night Stella and her brother witness the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross across the pond from her neighborhood. The two immediately return home and inform their parents, who then inform the black community. This news sends fear throughout the black community because the Klan has not been active for years, but there is a Presidential election coming up between Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The pastor makes an announcement that he will be registering to vote. He invites members of the congregation to join him. Stella's father and Mr. Oglethorpe are the only two who decided to join. Stella's father decided to take her along. When they arrive at the register's office they are insulted, then presented with tests and fees that only apply to blacks. They are also warned that trouble is coming their way. One evening Mr. Oglethorpe's house is set fire by the Klan while he and his family are inside. The house is a complete loss. The community comes together to help the Oglethorpe family. On voting day, the black community walks to town with the three men as they prepare to cast their votes.

Stella by Starlight is a book about racial injustice during the Jim Crow Era. Sharon M. Draper has done a wonderful job presenting a tough subject in a way that young people can understand. This book looks at America's ugly history of racism through the eyes of a young girl. Stella is a beautifully written character. She is smart, curious, and caring. My favorite thing about this book was the emphasis on community and family. The way they were able to show strength in the face of adversity, stand together, and support each other. I also liked that the author did not put the other half of the community in a box. She pointed out that everyone does not think the same, that not all white people were racist, and that some were willing to stand against racism. Some things to be aware of are terrorism, racism, ethnic slurs, and violence against children. Although these events take place in the story, they do not overwhelm it. This powerful story will entertain and educate. I would recommend buying this book to readers aged 10 - 12.

Recommended Titles:

A Thousand Never Evers, by Shana Burg

The Mighty Miss Malone, by Christopher Paul Curtis

Circle of Fire, by Evelyn Colmen