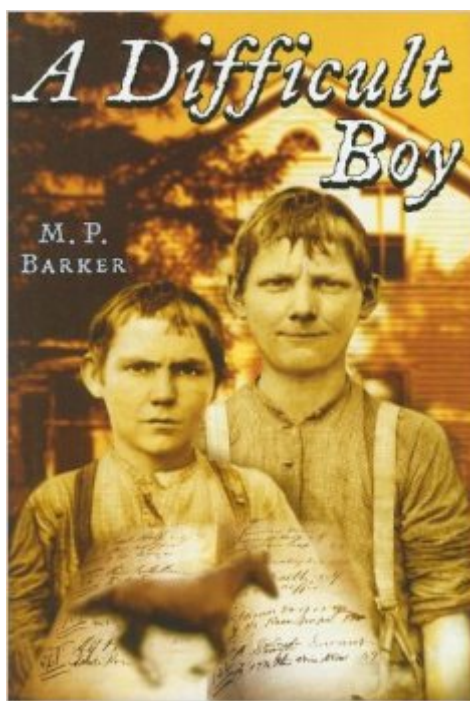


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A Difficult Boy



Synopsis

Reading level - Upper Middle Grade, Young Adult, and Adult readers (ages 10 and up) Riveting historical fiction from a debut novelist about the friendship that grows between two young indentured servants, one of them Irish, as they struggle to survive their harsh master in nineteenth century New England. It is 1839, Nine-year-old Ethan does not want to work for Mr. Lyman, the wealthy shopkeeper in their small Massachusetts' town. But Ethan has no choice--it is the only way to pay off his family's debt to the man. Ethan tries to befriend the Lymans' other indentured servant, but Daniel, as everyone says, is a difficult boy. Sixteen years old, Irish, and moody, Daniel brushes off Ethan as if he were a pesky gnat. Ethan resolves to ignore the brusque older boy, but is then shocked to see how cruelly Mr. Lyman's blows, and the two boys have only each other. Will Ethan be able to save his friend? And will others finally have the courage to do what is right for this not-so-difficult boy?

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 760L (What's this?)

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ISBN-13: 978-0823420865

Product Dimensions: 8.3 x 5.9 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (14 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

This book was written for teens, but this grandmother loved it. The suspense, waiting to find out what would happen to Ethan and Daniel, and learning whether they would ever receive justice, had

me sitting on the edge of my seat. I liked this book so much that I just bought it for my granddaughters, who I think will love it as much as I did.

This is a beautifully written book, intended for a young adult audience, but appropriate for all ages. It does not "dumb down" the language or sugar-coat the hardships of rural life for immigrants and the poor early 19th century. At the same time, the beauty of the natural world and the rhythm of farm life are painstakingly portrayed. The feelings of anger, loneliness, and displacement of Daniel, the Irish boy, are described in a way that most teens and many adults can easily identify with. The bond between the two boys and also the bond between Daniel and his horse, Ivy, are movingly captured. This book is a "must read" for teachers and young adults, a book that depicts a historical time and place, but renders emotions in a way that would speak to young people today.

Ethan's family is in trouble. His father, a smalltime farmer in rural New England in the 1830s, owes money to Mr. Lyman, a wealthy storekeeper and landowner. To help pay off the debts and save the family's property, Ethan, who is only 9, is forced to work for Mr. Lyman as an indentured servant, in an arrangement that is only a few steps away from slavery. Ethan is paired with Daniel, an orphaned Irish teenager who is also indentured to Mr. Lyman. Daniel has grown hard and sullen after years of being subjected to Mr. Lyman's bigotry and beatings, and at first the two boys have an uneasy relationship. But it isn't long before Ethan also feels the sting of Mr. Lyman's hand, and he and Daniel form a friendship forged by shared hardship and their love of a spirited horse. In its second half, the book begins to take on the trappings of a detective story. The Lyman household has many secrets, and Ethan begins to suspect that his own family's desperate financial situation is not of their own making. As the plot thickens, the pace quickens, and "A Difficult Boy" builds toward a climax that is filled with revelations and suspense. Through the judicious use of historical details, the author, M.P. Barker, creates a bracing sense of immediacy. Even the milking of an irritable cow becomes an occasion for tension and danger. Scenes of Ethan and Daniel riding bareback on Ivy, their master's horse, through an open field and later racing a scruffy peddler have a lyricism that will lift readers' hearts. "A Difficult Boy" is a deeply satisfying novel that both entertains and enlightens.

I agree with the other detailed reviews of the book, and I can't add much that would not be redundant. However, I will say that a beautiful novel written by a gifted author took me away into Ethan and Daniel's world, and I was not ready to leave when the book ended.

Although I'm not usually a fan of historical fiction, I absolutely could not put this book down. *A Difficult Boy* is the story of an indentured servant, Ethan, who gradually makes friends with another servant named Daniel. Everyone calls Daniel a difficult boy because he appears unfriendly and unkind. However, Ethan unravels the source of this unfriendliness: both boys are severely beaten by the man who owns the land that they work. Daniel is also beaten worse than Ethan, because he is an immigrant from Ireland and the owner of the land, Mr. Lyman, does not like him for this reason. Driven together through this, Ethan and Daniel forge a strong friendship that brings them together so that they can escape the beatings and that life. *A Difficult Boy* is a worthwhile historical fiction that is both well written and interesting.

I loved reading "A Difficult Boy" by M. P. Barker even though it is a teen historical fiction book set in Massachusetts in 1839. It is the story of two indentured servants, Ethan (9 yrs. old) and an orphan named Daniel aka Paddy, a few years older (who become friends and worked together to get their freedom. This book kept my interest all the way through and I felt sorry for the boys and anger towards their abusive master, Mr. Lyman, the town's well respected storekeeper. What a creep he was! My favorite part of the book though was when Daniel taught Ethan how to ride Ivy, Mr. Lyman's horse. I also liked the ending!! highly recommend this to anyone who enjoys historical fiction or stories about friendship. I think this would make a very good movie!

Randomly stumbled upon this book in the young adult section at the library. I love historical fiction and thought I'd give it a shot. It was very well written and engrossing. I was instantly drawn to the characters and felt connected to their plight. I definitely recommend this little known gem and was so glad to discover there was an equally good and emotionally captivating sequel!

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