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Threads And Flames



Synopsis

It's 1910, and thirteen-year-old Raisa has just traveled alone from a small Polish shtetl all the way to New York City. It's overwhelming, awe-inspiring, and even dangerous, especially when she discovers that her sister has disappeared and she must now fend for herself. She finds work in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory sewing bodices on the popular shirtwaists. Raisa makes friends and even-dare she admit it?- falls in love. But then 1911 dawns, and one March day a spark ignites in the factory. One of the city's most harrowing tragedies unfolds, and Raisa's life is forever changed. . . One hundred years after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, this moving young adult novel gives life to the tragedy and hope of this transformative event in American history.

Book Information

File Size: 753 KB

Print Length: 401 pages

Publisher: Viking Books for Young Readers (November 24, 2010)

Publication Date: November 24, 2010

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00466ILSW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #1,059,201 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #58

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Customer Reviews

While not quite as emotionally powerful as Haddix's *Uprising*, Friesner still creates characters and setting that are believable. I became quite attached to Raisa, Brina, Gavrel, and the rest. Raisa comes to America to escape her Jewish Shtetl. She plans to meet up with her sister, Henda, in New

York. But when she gets there with a young girl she has taken under her wing, she finds her sister missing. Frantically, Raisa looks for her sister, but first she must find a place to live and a job to support herself and Brina. She meets Gavrel, a garment worker and a rabbi in training. She moves in with his family and finally finds work in a sweatshop. With her dreams of an education and finding her sister, Raisa must find a way past the terrible conditions and mind-numbing, exhausting work at the Triangle Waist Company. And then the fire occurs and the life Raisa's has dreamed about hangs in the balance. Friesner does a fine job telling Raisa's story.

If you know about the Triangle Shirt Factory Fire, then you know its sad tale. This book presents a less oppressive, and yet even more emotional, look as it told through the eyes of one of the girls working there.

I really like what this author does in creating a narrative around historic events. The history is well researched and full of accurate historic details. This particular novel is my favorite of this kind that she has written. These books would make an excellent tool for teachers in English and history to make these historic figures come alive.

Friesner really captured the rhythm of tenement life. A personal spin on a preventable tragedy.

Well written! About page 170 the book becomes a page turner, and you just have to keep reading to find out what happens.

I highly recommend this book. It highlighted an interesting time in history from a unique perspective. It is definitely worth a read!

Loved it!

2011 marks the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire, one of the most important events in American labor history. This anniversary makes the release of *Threads and Flames* by Esther Friesner particularly timely. Friesner's novel opens in 1910, with thirteen-year old Raisa, recently recuperated from typhus, leaving her Polish shtetl to meet up with her sister Henda in America. After a long and difficult journey by cart, train, and ship, Raisa finally arrives in New York, only to learn that her sister has disappeared. With no job, no family, nowhere to live and unable to

speak English, she seeks refuge in a synagogue, where she meets a kind young rabbinical student, Gavrel, whose mother just happens to have room for boarders. Soon Gavrel helps Raisa get a job where he works, at the very modern Triangle Shirtwaist factory in the Asch building. In addition to working long hours at the factory, Raisa goes to evening English classes where she dreams of becoming a teacher. She still hopes to find her sister, but how to do so in such a huge city? In telling Raisa's story, Friesner paints a rich picture of Jewish immigrant life at the turn of the century; we can almost smell the food at the markets and see the celebrations for the different Jewish holidays. But Raisa's life changes forever on a March afternoon, when fire breaks out on the 8th floor of the Triangle factory. Hundreds of desperate workers tried to get out, but the doors on the stairway that could have provided a safe exit were locked--locked because the owners were afraid the young girls who worked at the factory would steal. Some, like Raisa, escape on the elevator, running outside only to see the horrific sight of bodies plunging through the air, with their clothes and hair on fire. The fire department was quickly on the scene, but the ladders wouldn't reach the top floors, and the nets and blankets that firemen spread to catch the young women couldn't withstand the force of their falls. The horror of the fire's aftermath is vividly captured by Friesner, as survivors try to discover who has lived and who has died in the fire, going to huge make-shift morgues to try to identify the bodies, some of which were burned beyond recognition and never identified. In all 146 workers died, mostly Jewish and Italian young women who were recent immigrants like Raisa, some as young as fourteen years old. I could perhaps quibble about the ending of this engrossing novel, in which all the loose threads of the story are neatly tied together, but despite the perhaps unlikely ending, I felt this was a well-realized novel with characters that will greatly appeal to the intended teenage audience. Because the reader grows to care deeply about Raisa and her friends, the tragic events of the story come vividly to life.

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