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Juvenile Fiction

Anna's Blizzard
Alison Hart
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Anna Vail, the heroine of this story of hardship, courage, and growing up on the Nebraska frontier, is eleven years old in the winter of 1888. She lives in a two-room sod house on a poor prairie farm with her mother, father, and little brother. Anna would rather ride her pony and work with the sheep on her family's farm than go to school on a "faux spring" January day. Her mother implores her constantly "to act like a lady," but Anna is continually getting herself in trouble.

She struggles to read and is convinced that she is too stupid to learn. When she arrives late for school, again, she encounters the displeasure of her caring teacher and taunts from some of her classmates. Others, like her best friend John Jacob, understand and sympathize with her reluctance to be inside on such a beautiful winter day.

A sudden blizzard blows up during the day, trapping the students in the school. Throughout the emergency, it is Anna who is practical and strong. She makes sure the horses are taken care of; keeps the littlest one warm by sharing her jacket; suggests ways to conserve the food so it will last long enough for all of them; and keeps everyone's spirits up with games, songs, and stories of how they will be rescued. When the roof nearly collapses on them, Anna and her faithful pony lead everyone out into the storm and to safety at the nearest farm. Through high praise from her teacher and parents, Anna learns that not everyone is book smart, and that common sense can save the day.

This book is reminiscent of the *Little House on the Prairie* series, and offers a good historical point of view in a more concise and simpler version than the Wilder books. The author intersperses a captivating story with history of the frontier, and demonstrates the hardships faced by the settlers during harsh winters, a striking contrast to life "back East," where Anna's teacher and mother lived. Reluctant readers will be able to relate to Anna's struggles with schoolwork

and her preference for the outdoors and animals.

A former teacher, Hart grew up on horseback and brings her experience riding a favorite pony bareback to the character of Anna. She has written more than forty books for young readers, including mysteries such as the “Riding Academy” series, and *Shadow Horse* a 2000 Edgar nominee for best children’s mystery.

This book has enough action to keep the reader’s interest, and enough realistic problems involving the main characters to make it believable. The end of the book includes more information and some photographs depicting life on the prairie in the 1880s. This enjoyable read is recommended for early readers and especially for struggling readers.

Deborah Jesseman