



Charlotte

Helen Hughes Vick

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A child worries about what games she will play that day. A woman worries about tomorrow and the days that follow.

These words summarize the two ends of thirteen-year-old Charlotte Baxter's journey. She has been transferred from her familiar home in Massachusetts to the Arizona Territory of 1868. That is nothing, however, compared to the emotional journey she is thrust into when her family's stagecoach is attacked by Apache warriors, leaving her the only survivor miles from what she knows as civilization.

In Vick's second book of the Courage of the Stone series, the reader meets Charlotte and Hu'ol, an old Pima woman who adopts her after the stagecoach attack. The struggle to survive and the relationship that develops between the two sustain Charlotte as she begins the greatest season of change in her life. While dealing with the painful loss of her parents, Charlotte discovers that other ways of life are not necessarily wrong or bad, just different from her own. She learns to look at the reasons behind people's actions and to not rush to judgement about an enemy.

The young protagonist is a strong example of the emotional challenges girls face as they move toward womanhood. Though her circumstances are far from what the average young girl faces, nine- to twelve-year-olds will easily relate to the lessons in this historically-based novel.

Though the transformation from unable-to-understand-each-other to fluent conversation between Charlotte and her adoptive guardian could have been a little smoother, the trust in Hu'ol that slowly grows within Charlotte is developed in such a smooth way that the reader ends up loving the old Pima woman as much as the heroine in the end. When the book is set down for the final time, Charlotte has become someone the reader is reluctant to let go. Like a friend who has moved away, one wonders what she'll do next.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (May / June 1999)

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