

John Montgomery, Revolutionary Fifer

Pat Duff

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John Montgomery, Revolutionary Fifer by Pat Duff is a captivating piece of historical fiction that follows the adventures of two teenage brothers during the American Revolution.

As war breaks out in the young nation's struggle for independence, thirteen-year-old John and his fifteen-year-old brother, Alex, yearn to join the cause against British tyranny. Too young to fight, John knows he can serve his country by playing his fife. The story follows the brothers as they try to help their country in her moment of need and leave boyhood behind forever, growing into patriotic Americans.

With the immediacy of its tone, the story captures the attention of readers from its first pages. Duffy writes, "The rain had stopped and the two brothers playing checkers on the front porch occasionally glanced up as the North Carolina rain dripped from the overhanging branches of the popular tree in the front yard." The reader is engaged by this well-described scene, and casual dialogue between the characters begins soon after, immediately throwing the reader into the heart of the story.

The book's illustrations provide young readers with another way of connecting to the tale and learning about the historical period that it describes. For instance, drawings and descriptions of a fife and drum and a tumpline, a sling formed from a strap that was used to help a soldier carry a heavy load, add to the educational value of the story.

The well-spaced lines, clean formatting, and tastefully designed pages will appeal to young readers. The vocabulary and story line match the maturity of the target audience, an independent reader of eight to twelve years of age. The historical content will enlighten, but not overwhelm, a young reader.

Additionally, the character's emotions are appropriate for the target audience and richly expressed without seeming trite. For example, John's simple request to kiss Sara on the cheek is heartwarming; their innocent romance will touch a reader of any age in a way that a more dramatic scene could not.

A descendant of the man who inspired her main character, the author's connection to the true story behind *John Montgomery, Revolutionary Fifer* gives the book a richness that it may have lacked otherwise. Overall, this lovely tale will capture the hearts of young children while providing them with a memorable glimpse into the life of a young American at the dawn of the nation.

EMILY ADAMS (July 17, 2012)

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