ELED 3113  
Fall 2018  
Hayley Nowlin

As Far As I Can See: Meg’s Prairie Diary

Author: Kate McMullan

Genre: Historical fiction

Guided reading level: P

Awards: none

Multicultural: no

Protagonist: Margaret Cora Wells- she is a dynamic and round character. She grows a lot as we see her story progress.

Antagonist: The slave owners, and cholera to a point

Settings: It starts out in St. Louis, Missouri and she has to move to Kansas with her relatives. So, she’s somewhere between those two locations the entire story.

Themes: Judgement, growth, and hope

Point of view: First person, told from the view point of Margaret Wells.

Conflict- Man vs. nature ( Meg has to leave her home because of the cholera epidemic in St. Louis).

"I am on a steamboat — a floating palace. I am on the upper deck, looking out over all of St. Louis. Not long ago, I wished to be here. Now my wish has come true. But I never wished it to happen this way!" writes nine-year-old Meg Wells in her diary. It is May of 1856, and Meg and her younger brother Preston (Pres) are on their way to spend the summer with relatives in the Kansas Territory. Mother and little sister Grace are ill with cholera, and it's not healthy for Meg and Pres to stay with them in St. Louis. Accompanied by a family friend, Dr. Baer, Meg and Pres soon discover that being on a riverboat is exciting. There is wonderful food, elegant surroundings, and a mysterious yellow-haired gambler who may actually be an outlaw!

After six days on the river, they arrive at Kansas City and must travel by wagon for four more days to their aunt and uncle's farm. The wide-open prairie amazes Meg. She writes, "Tall prairie grass grows as far as I can see. I feel as if we are traveling over a beautiful green tablecloth. I never knew the sky could be so big!"

Life at Aunt Margaret and Uncle Aubert's is very different from her life in St. Louis. Meg soon learns about buffalo chips, sod houses, bloomers, and Border Ruffians. She watches her uncle's field destroyed by grasshoppers, and she helps the family hide a runaway slave traveling the Underground Railroad.

Although she misses her parents and prays for her mother and Grace's recovery, Meg begins to enjoy life on the prairie. Life is full of surprises: she becomes friends with Lily Vanbeek, a girl who lives on the neighboring farm; the yellow-haired gambler turns out to be a photographer and family friend; and, best of all, Mother and Grace are well and have traveled to "the end of the earth" to join them. The family plans to settle permanently in Kansas. Meg writes: "Mr. Young, formerly known as the yellow-haired gambler, is calling us. He has set up his camera. He wants to take a picture of Uncle Aubert, Aunt Margaret, George, Charlie, John, Mother, Pres, Grace, all the many Vanbeeks, and me. Next year, Father will be here to be in the picture, too. Amen!"

Personal response

I really enjoy reading these diary type of books. I like them so much, because although it’s fiction, there are true historical events in them. I’d rather learn about history with a story than with straight facts. It helps me remember it because I have a story to relate to it. I’m sure there are other children who feel this way, because I know that history can be extremely boring at times. There are lots of books in this series as well, so if a student does like this book, they will have a ton to read after this one, which encourages their reading. I also liked that it included real facts in the back of the book. There are about 4-5 pages that include information about America during these same times.

Activity

At the beginning of her diary, Meg lists three of her favorite adventures. If she were to list three favorite adventures at the end of her diary, what do you think they'd be? If you were to list your three favorite adventures, what would they be? Pick one and write about it. The student’s would be able to share if they would like after they finished their writing. I chose this activity because it helps the children make connections to their own lives either while they read or afterwards.

Source: Teacher Made