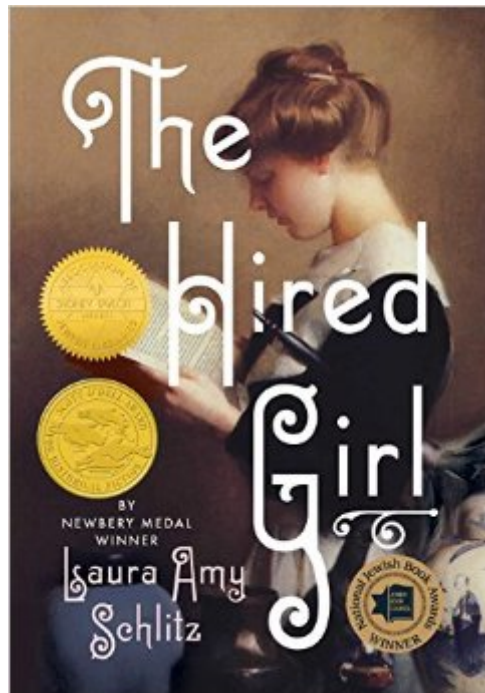


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The Hired Girl (Ala Notable Children's Books. Older Readers)



Synopsis

Winner of the 2016 Scott Oâ™Dell Award for Historical FictionA 2016 Association of Jewish Libraries Sydney Taylor Award WinnerWinner of the 2016 National Jewish Book Award for Childrenâ™s and Young Adult LiteratureNewbery Medalist Laura Amy Schlitz brings her delicious wit and keen eye to early twentieth-century America in a moving yet comedic tour de force.Fourteen-year-old Joan Skraggs, just like the heroines in her beloved novels, yearns for real life and true love. But what hope is there for adventure, beauty, or art on a hardscrabble farm in Pennsylvania where the work never ends? Over the summer of 1911, Joan pours her heart out into her diary as she seeks a new, better life for herselfâ”because maybe, just maybe, a hired girl cleaning and cooking for six dollars a week can become what a farm girl could only dream ofâ”a woman with a future. Newbery Medalist Laura Amy Schlitz relates Joanâ™s journey from the muck of the chicken coop to the comforts of a society household in Baltimore (Electricity! Carpet sweepers! Sending out the laundry!), taking readers on an exploration of feminism and housework; religion and literature; love and loyalty; cats, hats, and bunions.

Book Information

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Series: Ala Notable Children's Books. Older Readers

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ” See all reviewsÂ” (127 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #24,314 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 inÂ” Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Religious > Jewish #9 inÂ” Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > 20th Century #49 inÂ” Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Laura Amy Schlitz's new book, *The Hired Girl*, once again is a different story and voice than her previous work. She seems able to reinvent herself, with each new book adopting categorically different elements. Readers expecting the magic or fantastical elements present in some earlier works will not find them here. What they will find instead is a gratifying mix of romantic fantasies, earnest questions about faith and religious truth, and the development of a young, determined personality to create her future, assisted by help and love from unexpected sources. Schlitz creates a wholly human character in Joan Skrags, a 14 year old girl in 1911 thirsting for the learning, culture and knowledge to which she had only brief exposure through her mother and an insightful teacher, but which is cut short by her harsh and intimidating father after her mother's untimely death. As a "big, ugly ox of a girl", she is condemned to a life of drudgery on a hard scrabble farm, unappreciated by her father and 3 brothers. It is a telling sign about Joan that it is the burning of her 3 romantic novels, *Jane Eyre*, *Ivanhoe* and *Dombey and Son* that give Joan the resolve to flee her family and seek a new life. Joan ends up in Baltimore at night, lost with no place to stay after fleeing a man who tried to take liberties with her. By lucky chance she is taken in by the Rosenbachs, a prosperous Jewish family, and the real story of Joan's education and personal growth begins. This is a delightful story, narrated by Joan through her diary in which she can put down her most intimate thoughts, confusions, and fantasies. To gain work as a hired girl in the Rosenbach household, Joan pretends to be 18, forcing her to behave as she imagines an 18 year old would. Her physical development makes this somewhat believable but she still possesses a more childish mind and personality, albeit a very quick one capable of learning and insight. Joan considers herself an earnest Catholic, the faith of her mother to whose memory Joan is very loyal. While she comes to respect, and even love, the Rosenbachs she is also trying fervently to deepen her Catholic faith with the help of a local priest. The conflict and resolution this engenders is an important lesson for Joan, as for us all. Joan also creates a number of conflicts of her own within the Rosenbach family through her well-intentioned naïve efforts to help them. Despite the near term humiliations and embarrassments she experiences as a result, the ultimate results are happy ones and Joan learns from each event. It is not easy to show the growth of a character like Joan, but Schlitz's own experience as a librarian/teacher has shown her the truth of such things and she develops Joan in a very believable manner. Furthermore, all the other characters are also well developed and believable. I felt I knew and understood them all by the end of the book. The lessons Joan learns are those that all young persons should learn, and even many adults. This book is another masterpiece from Schlitz. I can't wait to see in what new direction she'll head next!

The Hired Girl is a book filled with interesting themes: feminism, religion, class distinctions, romance, and family. While reading, I often was prompted to think about one of those topics in a different way, while the characters were interesting enough to keep me invested. Unfortunately, the end result is that all those themes get muddled together amongst each other and the novel isn't nearly as clear in concept at the end as it is in the beginning. For a basic plot summary, The Hired Girl tells the story of 14-year old Joan Skraggs. Living on a poor Pennsylvania farm, her father is a crude workman who has no respect for her or pretty much all of womankind. With Joan's mother deceased (worked to death by Pa, explains Joan), he is able to rule the roost with an iron fist. All Joan wants to do is get away from farm life to become a teacher, and when Pa pulls her out of classes and insults the schoolmarm in the process, she decides to run away. She ends up as a hired girl (servant/worker) for a well-to-do Jewish family in Baltimore, where she begins to question her religious (Catholic) upbringing, her social status, and her blossoming (and of course forbidden) relationship with a young man within the household she serves. Author Laura Amy Schlitz does a marvelous job of making Joan a sympathetic character right from the get-go. Her Pa is a truly terrible person that creates a sort of purgatory for the hard-working, yet creative/inquisitive child. While she plots to run away, readers will be completely swept up in her quest. Even when Joan finds her new occupation in Baltimore, she still manages to be an interesting figure as she meets all of the diverse characters within the household and integrates into the daily comings-and-goings. Unfortunately, it is at this point where The Hired Girl starts to splinter (and not necessarily in a good way). The first half of the book sets up a strong, inspiring female character. The second half turns into a pretty standard forbidden romance tale. All that great character development and exploration of themes in the early chapters seems to melt away in favor of sappy romance and much more religious exploration than one would expect. I kept waiting for the text to circle back and pick up on those threads from the beginning, but it never does. Overall, I was very intrigued by the setup of The Hired Girl, but after the conditions/characters of the story are established, I felt like it turned far too much into a traditional romantic tale (considering the more lofty goals it seems to initially aspire to). As such, I can't give it more than 3-stars. It was a good read, and stirred a lot of interesting themes, but that stirring didn't seem lead to much of a finished product.

I bought this book knowing nothing about it and I was so pleasantly surprised by it! It was one of the

best books I read all year. I found it a cross between the fun, intimate first person story telling of a book like "Confessions of a Shopaholic" and a lovely, historical book like "Anne of Green Gables." I would especially recommend this book for young women, but as an adult it completely held my attention. The narrator had my complete empathy. She was a credible, relatable narrator. I'm excited to read more from this author.

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