

Opinion: What Have Other People Thought About *Shiloh*?



It's a winner!

Shiloh is a winner—a Newbery Award winner, that is. Phyllis Reynolds Naylor won the 1992 Newbery Medal for *Shiloh*. The Newbery is a very prestigious honor: It is given annually by the children's librarians of the American Library Association to the author of “the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” published the preceding year. Look at your copy of *Shiloh* and you might see the award, printed in gold on the cover.

In addition to being a big hit with the fifteen librarians on the Newbery Committee, *Shiloh* was and is a big hit with kids. The book continues to be popular more than ten years after it was first published. *Shiloh* is so popular, in fact, that Phyllis Reynolds Naylor wrote two sequels, and the original and the first sequel have been made into movies.

Does the dialect add to or take away from your understanding?

Despite *Shiloh*'s popularity, there have been a few criticisms of the book. Most reviewers liked the use of dialect. One reviewer wrote, “The book is filled with West Virginia dialect, furthering the strong and well-defined sense of place.” But another wrote,

“Readers may have difficulty understanding some of the first-person narration as it is written in rural West Virginian dialect.”

Is this boy for real?

Another criticism of the book is that the character of Marty Preston seems too good to be true. These critics argue that Marty’s decision to follow his conscience, to tell Judd he’s not giving Shiloh back, even though this decision might involve personal risk, is not normal behavior for an eleven-year-old boy. “Most adults, let alone children, do not operate at this high level” of moral behavior, the critics argue. They do not say that this takes away from the value of the book, however. “We believe that what Marty does for readers, particularly children, is provide them with an example of what they can aspire to become,” one critic writes.

Thinking about what others think about *Shiloh*

- Do you think that *Shiloh* seems like an award-winning book?
What other Newbery Award-winning books have you read?
How does *Shiloh* compare?
- What do you think of the author’s use of West Virginia dialect in *Shiloh*? Do you think it adds to or detracts from the book?
Did you find it difficult to read?
- Do you think Marty Preston’s moral behavior is too mature for an eleven-year-old boy? Why or why not? Do you think it harms the book in any way if it is? Do you think it’s good to read about characters who provide you with an example of what you can try to become?

Glossary



abandon to leave forever

antibiotic a drug, such as penicillin, that kills bacteria and is used to cure infections and disease

blackmail to threaten to reveal a secret about someone unless the person pays a sum of money or grants a favor

commences begins

cringe to shrink in fear

decency respectable and proper behavior

detour a longer alternative route usually taken when the direct route is closed for repairs

enthusiasm great excitement or interest

envy to wish that you could have something that another person has or do something that he or she has done

grovel to be unnaturally humble and polite to someone because you are afraid of the person or because you think he or she is very important

gunnysack a sack made of coarse heavy fabric

investigator someone who finds out as much as possible about something

jubilation great happiness and delight

lard a solid, white grease, made from the melted fat of pigs and hogs, that is used in cooking

mournful feeling, showing, or filled with grief

omission the act of leaving something out

parlor a formal living room

quavery shaky

remedy something that relieves pain, cures a disease, or corrects a disorder

slog to work hard and steadily

snarl to growl angrily

snitch to be a tattletale

stethoscope a medical instrument used by doctors and nurses to listen to the sounds from a patient's heart, lungs, and other areas

suspicious distrustful; thinking that something is wrong, with little or no proof to back up these feelings

sympathy the understanding and sharing of other people's troubles

turpentine a thin distilled oil used as a paint thinner, solvent, and liniment

warble to sing with trills, runs, or other melodic sounds

warden an official who is responsible for enforcing certain laws

whetstone a stone for sharpening tools

wince to flinch or shrink back because you are in pain, embarrassed, or disgusted