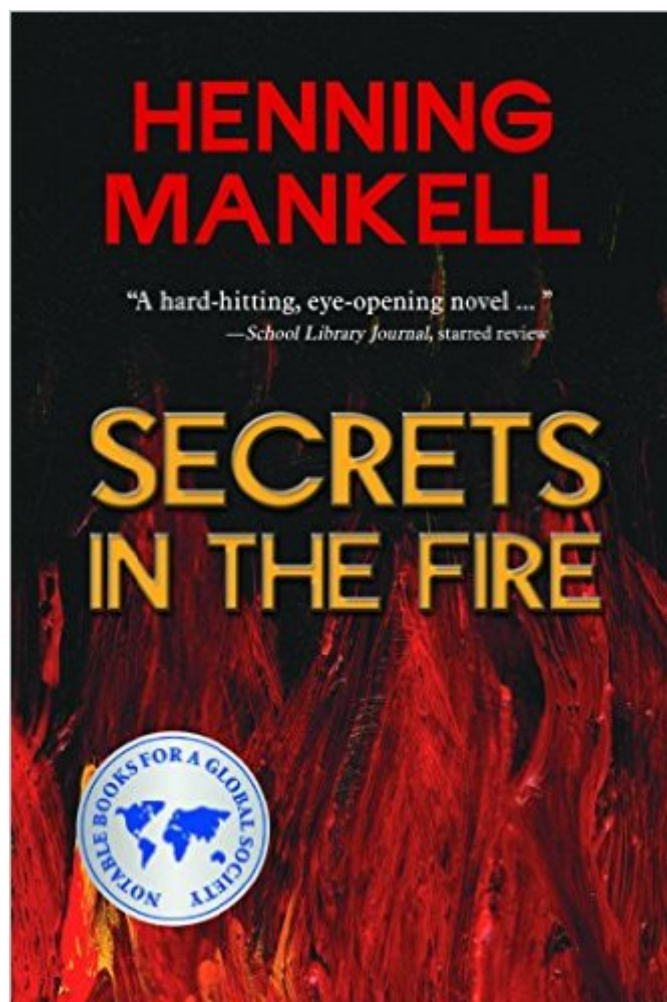


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Secrets In The Fire



Synopsis

It is the wise old woman of the village who teaches young Sofia about the secrets in the fire. Within the flames hide all things past and all things yet to be. But not even old Muazena can see the horrors the fire holds for Sofia and her family; not the murderous bandits who drive them from their home, and not the landmine that takes Sofia's legs. In her long journey toward recovery, Sofia must still deal with growing up. Along the way, she discovers friends, and foes, in places she'd never expected. Through it all, Sofia draws on a strength she never knew she had, a fire of her own that's been a secret all along. In beautifully spare, unsentimental language, Henning Mankell's stunning novel puts a very human face on the suffering in Africa.

Book Information

Paperback: 166 pages

Publisher: Annick Press; 1st Paperback Edition edition (September 1, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1550378007

ISBN-13: 978-1550378009

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.5 x 7.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (8 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #580,177 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #163 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Violence #275 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Africa #280 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Military

Age Range: 12 - 14 years

Grade Level: 6 - 12

Customer Reviews

This spare story presents the story of a young girl, Sophia, after she steps on a land mine. The impact of the well-chosen description of the circumstances is powerful. From the brutal reality of the loss of her village and the travel looking for a place to live, to the thoughts which carry Sophia through her daily life, this book is a memorable experience. We, who complain if the weather is too humid, could take a moment and reflect on the beauty of every day and the many fortunes of our lives. There are many groups advocating for land mine clean-up; the power of their cause is clarified and personalized by the simple life of an actual young woman named Sophia. She is a real survivor.

It would be an honor to meet her.

I love Henning Mankell and have read 19 or 20 of his books. Three more are on my nightstand. One of the things I love his work is that he has great lyrical style AND the stories are gripping, exciting well thought out. A pleasure to read. I loved this story and am grateful for his bringing this true experience to light. I did not like the translation. The sentences were jerky and presented in a very unprofessional writing style. I have a hard time giving such a beautiful story less than 5 stars but the writing was just bad. I wondered if, because it is advertised as a children's story, the translator thought that the wording should be infantile. If so, this translator has insulted the ability of children and assumes that they can not appreciate the beauty with which Mankell usually presents his work.

Although this is a book for grades 6-12 it is a story for all ages. The late Henning Mankell spent a lot of time in Africa and "Secrets in the Fire" is a true story. He became a friend of the main character in the book, Sophie, from Mozambique. Sophie's village was raided by bandits and her father was killed, leaving her mother and her sister, Maria, and Sophie to flee a long ways to another place to live. They found a village where they felt safe from raids and had a roof over their heads. The fire that Sophie and her family often sat around was very important because an old lady named Muazena told Sophie that there were secrets hidden in the flames and if she looked deep enough she would find them. As life went along by the river in their new hut, Sophie and Maria played every day, but on a particular day Sophie stepped on a landmine and tragedy occurred. This book is about the struggles that a young girl went through in order to realize her dreams, no matter what had happened, and shows the incredible strength of one who had so little but did so much with what she had. The strength of mind, body and spirit prevail in this excellent book. The book is 163 pages long and goes by fast since it is hard not to get caught up in the story. Information is given in the back of the book about landmines and what we can all do to help clear the landmine fields that are left in the world.

A story told with compassion and power that stays with you long after you finish. Henning Mankel had such breadth of writing beyond his well known detective novels. Written for young adults but universal message and still relevant.

Because I read some background material on Henning Mankell prior to purchasing this book, I knew the main character in this story (Sophia) was real. The forward to the book also underscores that.

That knowledge in advance of reading the book definitely impacts the reading. Admittedly, I'm unsure about the degree of impact if it had been the reverse - to learn that at the end. But impacting and humbling it would be in any and all events. This is an amazing story about an amazing person. I have traveled and lived in close proximity to poverty stricken areas around the world over my lifetime. Having seen some of that squalor renders my impression of the events in this story even more meaningful with continual thoughts of "I just can't imagine ..." as the story unfolds. I rated this a "5" in part to honor Mankell for honoring Sophia; in part to honor Sophia who deserves the highest rating in life for her courage. It's difficult to use the phrase "it's good book" for a story recounting the pain and suffering of an amazing child but the "5" rating is also for a story with the strongest example possible of an indomitable (Henning's most descriptive adjective) human spirit. I'd encourage all to purchase this book.

We are almost rabid Mankell fans. He covers a gamut of themes and does them all very well. Does not disappoint.

Excellent

This is an excellent author. The Swedish to English translation is very good. The plot flows nicely and has an exciting ending.

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