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Flygirl



Synopsis

For fans of *Unbroken* and *Ruta Sepetys*. All Ida Mae Jones wants to do is fly. Her daddy was a pilot, and years after his death she feels closest to him when she's in the air. But as a young black woman in 1940s Louisiana, she knows the sky is off limits to her, until America enters World War II, and the Army forms the WASP-Women Airforce Service Pilots. Ida has a chance to fulfill her dream if she's willing to use her light skin to pass as a white girl. She wants to fly more than anything, but Ida soon learns that denying one's self and family is a heavy burden, and ultimately it's not what you do but who you are that's most important. Read Sherri L. Smith's posts on the Penguin Blog

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

I have so many good things to say about this book, I don't know where to start... First, I loved the heroine, Ida Mae. Ida is a small town farm girl whose father introduced her to crop dusting at an early age. Ida loves to fly and when America enters World War 2, she gets tired of collecting silk stockings and cleaning houses and decides to join the WASP. Despite her amazing flying abilities, the WASP will turn her away simply because she is half black. Ida's desire to fly and aide her brother overseas in the only way she knows how overcomes her fears and she passes herself off as white so that she may do so. Her mother gets upset, her best friend gets upset, but Ida doesn't let them stop her and off she goes Sweetwater, Texas to fly. On top of getting a firm feel for life at

Avenger Field during world war 2 and the flight training and procedures, readers also get a look at what it is like to be black in the 1940s. Ida is always having to worry about her hair curling too much or somebody figuring out her secret because back then, her secret could get her killed. On top of the racial tension is the fact that she is a woman to boot. I doubt anybody had it harder back then. Women in general had it rough, but being a black woman... most of us would not have had Ida's courage. Also in the story is how Ida deals with conflicting emotions regarding her family in New Orleans (she feels she is denying her own heritage and family, especially when her mom comes to visit and has to act like her maid) and her family in Sweetwater. How would her newfound white friends act if they knew the truth? My only complaint about this novel is we never found that out. There is also a situation with the loss of a friend.

"'Yes, indeed.' Audrey salutes me this time. 'Isn't it funny, ladies, how there's always a man at the bottom of everything we do?'" After reading *FLYGIRL*, I still have not the slightest desire to learn to fly an airplane. There are just too many problems that can pop up with such complex mechanical things. When something unexpected occurs with my Toyota pickup, I simply pull over and pull out the cell phone and the AAA card. One doesn't have the same luxury with an airplane, as we see all too vividly in *FLYGIRL*, Sherri L. Smith's high-flying tale of a young, light-skinned, southern woman of color who "passes" for white during World War II so that she can compete for a position flying in the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program. Ida Mae Jones and her fellow women pilots go through months of rigorous training so that they can assume responsibility for military flight tasks on the homefront. The WASP pilots thereby free up the Army's male pilots so that the men can then head into combat overseas in the European and South Pacific theaters. Ida Mae grew up in her father's crop duster -- after her father blazed his own trail by heading north to Chicago in order to get pilot's training and a license -- and she lives to fly. But now her father is dead in a tractor accident, there is gasoline rationing because of The War, and her big brother, Thomas, has enlisted as a medic. Free as a bird in the air, this young woman is one smart, careful, and damned-near fearless flygirl. Ida Mae's difficulties are, instead, encountered when she is back on the ground: "Pretending to be white is like holding your stomach in at the lake when the boys walk by.

Sherri L. Smith's *Flygirl* is definitely going on my 2010 favourite's list. I'm also counting it as one of my all-time favourite Young Adult reads. . . heck, it's a favourite book all round. The book opens in December 1941, on the day that Pearl Harbor is attacked by the Japanese. Not long after the attack the US army develop the WASP program - Women Airforce Service Pilots. Twenty-year-old Ida Mae

Jones dreams of the sky. Her dearly-departed Daddy taught her to fly for crop dusting. . . but Ida dreams of more. She dreams of heading to Chicago to get her pilot's licence and joining the Women's Auxiliary. But she has one big strike against her - Ida Mae is black. The Civil Rights Movement isn't even a blip on the American radar and there's no way in hell Ida Mae will fly in the skies if she presents herself as a woman of colour. But Ida's Daddy was a light-skinned black man (from years of his family trying to climb the social ladder by marrying and procreating with whites). Ida has 'good hair' and can pass for Spanish blood. So Ida Mae lies. She pretends to be white in order to join WASP. Ida turns her back on everything she knows and everyone she loves in order to help her country and earn her place in the skies. Ida joins WASP and flies to her heart's content. . . but if it means refusing her family and heritage, if it means acting white to get ahead in life. . . then what is Ida fighting for in the first place? Everything about this book is breathtaking. Even the front-cover looks like a movie-poster and has a Rosie the Riveter feel to it. Sherri L. Smith's writing is divine - at once a beautiful slice of 1940's life and a jarring examination of race-relations in the Deep South.

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