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The Freedom Maze



Synopsis

In 1960, thirteen-year-old Sophie slips through a maze into 19th century Louisiana and finds nothing is as she expected.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1960 New Orleans, thirteen-year-old Sophie Martineau is struggling to cope with her parents' recent divorce. Her father has moved to New York City, and her former best friend is no longer allowed to socialize with the child of a single mother. To make matters worse, Sophie's mother has decided to send her to Oak Cottage, an old plantation outside of New Orleans, to stay with her grandmother and aunt for the summer. Bored and lonely, Sophie makes a wish to be someone else, and is inadvertently transported back in time to 1860. Having spent several weeks in the sun exploring the bayou of Oak Cottage, Sophie's tanned skin causes her to be mistaken for a slave, and she is immediately put to work in Oak River House, the luxurious home of her ancestors, the Fairchilds. Sophie is used to the racial segregation in the south of 1960, but nothing prepares her for the cruelty and discrimination she experiences as a slave in a pre-Civil War plantation. Inspired by real life slave narratives and memoirs, veteran author Delia Sherman's *The Freedom Maze* proves to be a well-written and intriguing novel that is both entertaining and educational. Although the story involves time travel to the 19th century, it begins in the past, over fifty years ago, at the dawn of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Sophie is a complex character, as is her mother, a recently divorced, bitter woman who warns Sophie against associating with "negroes," especially men. As

was likely the case with many children during this period of time, Sophie is unsure of exactly why she is supposed to be afraid of African Americans, but takes her mother's word for it, trying hard to be a proper southern lady.

The Freedom Maze is one of those beautifully crafted, almost underhanded coming of age stories where it's impossible to observe the changes in one you see every day, until suddenly you're faced with the contrast of who they once were. Sophie is a girl reaching most tentatively that border between being a child and being a young woman. Being pushed most forcibly toward the latter by her quite proper mother, Sophie feels stifled in her own skin (and especially the stockings, not to mention the bra). Wonderfully, it is Sophie's refusal to release her grasp on the childhood notions of adventure and magic that eventually lead her into who she will become. Delia Sherman completely sucked me in with so many of those things I can't resist-good historical fiction and good time travel among them. A relatively uncomplicated time travel tale, Sophie is thrown from her summer life at the family estate in Louisiana 1960 into life at the family estate (and plantation) in 1860. Both time periods were rife with struggles for Civil Rights; one for freedom, the other for equality. Because Sherman chose to focus the story on Sophie, a privileged white southerner of 1960 who is forced to become a light-skinned slave in 1860, we are afforded this window of opportunity to understand both worlds from an angle I, for one, have never seen. What I loved most about Sophie's development was that her personal perspective on African Americans didn't change so much as her understanding of them as human beings of equal (or greater) worth. She is a young person being brought up to have the perspective of her white southern family, never before realizing that as kind as they may seem, treating one with kindness is not the same as treating them as an equal.

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