

Calico Bush Study Guide

Calico Bush by Rachel Field

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Plot Summary

Calico Bush is a novel by author Rachel Field. This novel features a young French girl abandoned in the New World in the mid-seventeen hundreds who finds herself bound-out to a family who has recently bought a farm in the relatively wild lands of coastal Massachusetts. Marguerite is an outcast in this family, ridiculed for her French ancestry in a time when the French are considered as dangerous an enemy as the Indians. However, Marguerite proves herself to be an asset to the family on multiple occasions when she saves the children from harm, rescues the family animals, and keeps the Indians from attacking their house. Calico Bush is a charming novel of the birth of a country, showing the struggles of the early settlers through the eyes of a true, if somewhat unwilling, immigrant.

Marguerite Ledoux came to America with an uncle and her grandmother with the intention of settling in Quebec. However, illness came to the ship within sight of land and Marguerite's uncle died. The captain put Marguerite and her grandmother ashore in a coastal town of the new colonies, where the grandmother became ill and soon died. Marguerite was then given to a family as a bound-out girl, a situation in which Marguerite would be cared of until the age of eighteen in exchange for her services. Now Marguerite is on a boat traveling to the family's new farm along the sea coast of Massachusetts.

On the trip, Marguerite's main chore is to care for the five small children belonging to her new family. Keeping the children entertained can be a chore on such a small vessel. Then one night there is a terrible storm and Marguerite finds herself desperately holding on to a sheep through the night to keep it from washing overboard. A short time later, the family lands in a small town where they are able to restock some of the supplies lost in the storm. During this lay over, Marguerite and the children find a stray dog that the family adopts and calls Pumpkin.

When the family comes to their new farm, they discover that the Indians have burned down the beautiful house they expected to find there. The neighbors on the small islands throughout the channel warn the family not to settle on this piece of land. The neighbors claim being there will simply encourage more attacks by the Indians because these Indians apparently think this section of land is a holy site of some sort. Despite these warnings, the family continues with their plans to settle the land.

Marguerite meets the elderly neighbor, Aunt Hepsa, and learns a great deal about herbs and spices from her. In Aunt Hepsa, Marguerite finds a motherly figure she can admire. At the same time, Marguerite finds herself constantly busy helping with the family. At one point, Marguerite has to paddle a boat into the channel to direct the family cows in the right direction. As time passes, the men raise a small house. When it is time to put the roof on the house, the family throws a big party. All the neighbors come and there is more food than Marguerite has seen in a long time.



Toward the end of the roof raising party, Marguerite follows the dog into the woods and discovers a bear eating the last of the butter. Marguerite bravely throws water in the bear's face to keep it from attacking the children. A short time later, one of the boys is in the way when a hammer falls from the roof. Marguerite helps Aunt Hepsa stitch up the injury and care for the boy.

Winter sets in and it is a difficult time. The family takes to sleeping around the fireplace in order to keep warm at night. One night, the family wakes to the baby's screams. The baby has crawled too close and caught her shawl on fire. Marguerite and the eldest boy rush to Aunt Hepsa's over the frozen channel for help, but the burns are too devastating. The baby dies.

When spring arrives, the family makes syrup from the sap of the maple tree. The family is low on supplies, so when a ship comes looking for extra men, the children's uncle jumps at the chance. While he is gone, however, the father crushes his leg while attempting to clear the fields alone. While he is sick, the Indians come to the little farm. Marguerite shows them they mean no harm by first offering them food and later by making a maypole and showing them how to use it. Marguerite's scheme is successful and the Indians leave them in peace.

When the ship returns a short time later, the family offers to give Marguerite her freedom and allow her to sail on the ship to French Quebec. Marguerite is happy about the offer, but realizes she would rather remain with her new family.



Part 1: Summer

Part 1: Summer Summary

The novel is set in 1743, a time when this country was still new and there was still land waiting for the right family to settle it. The family in this novel settles a new farm along the sea coast of Massachusetts.

Marguerite Ledoux was to move to Quebec with her uncle and grandmother, where her uncle planned to teach people to dance, but illness stole her uncle's life while still aboard ship. The captain put Marguerite and her grandmother to shore in the American colonies where the grandmother quickly died as well. Now Marguerite is on another ship with a family to whom she has been bound-out to in exchange for room and board. The family is traveling from Marblehead to a new farm the father has bought on a piece of land in the coastal section of Massachusetts.

Marguerite's job is to help Dolly Sargent care for her and her husband's five young children as well as the other household chores. Keeping the children safe and occupied on the small boat is difficult. Marguerite's job is made even harder by Joel Sargent's son from his first wife, Caleb, who has a negative opinion of anyone from France. To compound things on this first day of sailing, Joel Sargent is unhappy with the captain's complaints about the number of heavy items the family insists on taking to their new home.

That night, Marguerite, Dolly, and the younger children go into the cabin below to sleep while Caleb, Joel, and Joel's brother, Ira, stay up to help the captain sail the ship. During the night, Marguerite is awakened by the sounds of a terrible storm. When Marguerite goes to the door to see what is going on, she realizes that Caleb is having a hard time keeping the cows and sheep from washing overboard. In fact, Marguerite sees a sheep slide overboard as she watches. Marguerite makes her way to Caleb's side despite the warnings of the other men, and holds on to a sheep for dear life most of the night until the storm finally passes. For this, Marguerite overhears Joel and the captain compliment her character.

A day later the ship stops in Falmouth, where the Sargents disembark for some much needed supplies. While the adults go into town, Marguerite and the children pick strawberries and Caleb cuts grass for the livestock. A man stumbles upon the children and tells Caleb stories of Indians in the area that could pose a threat to a family with young children. With the man is a yellow dog the children instantly take a liking to. When the man tells them the dog is not his, they instantly beg Marguerite to allow them to keep it. Marguerite is just as happy as the kids when Joel Sargent gives his approval to this plan.

Talk of Indians worries Dolly Sargent, but Joel remains determined to settle on his new farm. Unfortunately, fog keeps them out to sea several days longer than anticipated.



Finally they make their way to the little channel where the farm is. There are islands all along the channel that have been settled by other families and Joel names them as they pass by. When they come to their own piece of land, everyone is heartbroken to realize the promised house is not there. As they disembark, a neighbor from Sunday Island rows over, Ethan and Seth Jordan, to tell them about the raids by Indians that ended in the burning of their house. Seth Jordan warns the Sargent family that settling on this land, land that is held sacred to the Indians from Canada, could be a deadly proposition. Seth advises them to pick from one of the still vacant islands. However, Joel Sargent remains determined to settle this land that he gave up everything he owns to have.

Over the next few days, the family unloads their belongings from the boat. There is some debate as to how to unload the animals. It is finally decided they should push the animals into the water and allow them to swim to shore. It works well with the sheep, but the cows become disoriented and begin swimming in the opposite direction. Marguerite acts fast, taking a small rowboat out into the water and directing the animals to Sunday Island before they can be caught up in the ocean current and washed out to sea. Exhausted when the ordeal is over, Marguerite is invited to the home of Seth Jordan's aunt, Aunt Hepsa. Aunt Hepsa is a kindly woman who shows Marguerite much of the vegetation of Sunday Island that she uses in her wool dyes. Marguerite ends up spending the night with Aunt Hepsa in her large, luxurious bed.

Part 1: Summer Analysis

In this first part of the book, the reader learns how Marguerite came to America from her beloved home of Le Havre, France. Marguerite's story is tragic, made only more so when the reader realizes that Marguerite has come to America in a time when France was often considered the enemy, warring with the settlers nearly as much as the Indians do. It is as though Marguerite is an Indian female forced into servitude to a family of American pilgrims. This makes things difficult for Marguerite, but she proves herself to be a strong and loyal girl when she twice helps save the animals that are so very important to the survival of any new American settlers. Marguerite's situation is made somewhat easier when she meets Aunt Hepsa, a wise old woman who will not only take Marguerite under her wing, but will become the one true friend every young woman needs.

The history of this novel is very important because it tells a story of the early settlers of America. The novel begins in 1743, thirty years before the American Revolution. In this time period, America is still a set of colonies owned by the English government. Although there were many large settlements in this time period, most of the prime farmland was unoccupied by white settlers and filled with new and unexpected adventure. This includes the Indians, who were on this land first and were being forced off of traditional hunting and worshipping lands. This made the areas like the one where the Sargent family has chosen to make their home a dangerous place to be. Therefore, the Sargent family and Marguerite find themselves in dangerous and unknown territory.



Part 2: Fall

Part 2: Fall Summary

The Sargent men have built a new house and now it is time to raise the roof. All the neighbors from the boarding islands are coming to help. Marguerite has never heard of a raising, but she is excited to see all the new neighbors and to partake in all the food that will be served. Marguerite helps clean up the young children, but is disappointed that she will not be able to help in the food preparation. Instead, Marguerite is charged with watching the children, the Sargent children and all the neighbors' children as well.

Marguerite and the children watch the men build the roof as they play in the cool fall air. At lunch there are more delicacies than Marguerite knows what to do with, and the excitement of the day makes her appetite disappear. After lunch, the children are playing with Pumpkin when he suddenly becomes agitated. Marguerite and the children follow him to a nearby creek, where they discover a bear has come to eat the last of the butter cooling in the water. The bear becomes angry and threatens to attack, but Marguerite keeps him away by throwing water in its face. The men chase after the bear when the children tell them what has happened, but the bear is long gone.

Late in the day, the roof is on the house and the men are working on the finishing touches. As Joel Sargent puts glass in the windows, his young son Jacob stands in the doorway. A hammer falls from the roof and Jacob is struck in the forehead. Marguerite holds the little boy as Aunt Hepsa uses needle and thread to sew the ends of the cut together. This accident spells disaster for the new house, but none of the women are willing to tell Dolly or her family their fears.

Later in the day, the captain of the *Isabella B.* that brought the Sargent family to their new farm is ready to sail back to Marblehead. Ethan Jordan and Timothy Welles sail with her to get supplies from the big city. Everyone watches Abby Welles, curious if watching Ethan leave will cause her any heartache. Abby is being courted by Ethan Jordan, but Ira Sargent has shown interest in her as well.

Several weeks pass. The Jordans come to visit often. Dolly makes a deal with Aunt Hepsa to give her the sheep in exchange for some of the cloth Aunt Hepsa will spin from it. Seth brings apple cuttings for the family to plant in hopes of having strong apple trees one day. At the same time, Ira Sargent begins making many visits to the Welles home to see young Abby.

As the weather turns cold, Caleb leads Marguerite and the children to a field not far from the house where they can gather witch hazel. As the children pick the plant, Caleb goes in search of squirrels. The children finish and grow bored waiting for Caleb. Finally, the children talk Marguerite into walking home without Caleb. In a short time they become lost. When it begins to rain, Marguerite spots a cave. However, when Marguerite goes inside to investigate, she discovers evidence that someone burned a



human being there. Marguerite is so frightened she rushes the children away. A short time later they stumble into Caleb, who is angry with Marguerite for trying to find her way home alone.

Late that night, Marguerite shows Ira, Joel, and Dolly the things she found in the cave. They are all frightened about what it could mean for their future. Joel forbids anyone of talking about it again. A few days later, Aunt Hepsa invites Marguerite to help her weave some of the newly dyed wool.

Part 2: Fall Analysis

The Sargents are determined to remain on their land despite the warnings of the neighbors. This foreshadows a confrontation with the Indians that could end in the deaths of one or more of the Sargent family, including Marguerite. The reader can feel the tension rise in the plot as Marguerite shows the family what she has found in the cave, making the reader wonder just what might happen when spring finally arrives. The question that is upper most on the readers mind is whether or not the family will still remain when summer comes around again.

The neighbors, despite their fears that having the Sargents settle this piece of land again could invite trouble with the Indians, are willing to help them whenever necessary because there are so few people in the area that they each need to rely on one another. It is a difficult existence, living in such a wild world, that no one can disrespect a neighbor and expect to survive. This includes competitions over women. Both Ira Sargent and Ethan Jordan are in love with the same girl and the reader finds it amusing to watch them both court her with hopes of one day making a bride of her. There is no clue as to who might have the upper hand at this point, but Marguerite is clearly pulling for Ira.



Part 3: Winter

Part 3: Winter Summary

In November, the Jordans invite everyone to Sunday Island for a corn-shelling bee. The talk of the area has been about the china tea cups Ethan Jordan brought back for Abby Welles, suggesting that Ethan is the top runner for her hand in marriage. Ira Sargent is depressed over this idea and spends much of the day in a dark mood. At the corn-shelling bee, it is said the person who finds the red ear of corn will be the first to marry. Marguerite finds the red ear behind a wooden trough where it must have fallen. Marguerite sneaks it to Ira, making everyone think he was the one to find it. This lifts Ira's mood.

After all the corn is shelled, Seth Jordan gets out his violin and everyone begins to dance. After a group dance, Aunt Hepsa dances to entertain the crowd. Marguerite does a French dance for the crowd, feeling truly happy for the first time in a long time. However, all of the women present short of Aunt Hepsa disapprove. Standing near a window in a dark mood, Marguerite happens to look over to the point where the Sargent house stands and sees smoke. Marguerite shows it to Caleb, who quickly shows his father.

Everyone is convinced there are Indians on the point. Joel, Ira, and Ethan quickly prepare to depart for the island to protect the Sargent house. As they leave, Abby stops Ira and begs him not to go. It is this reaction that makes it clear to everyone present who Abby has chosen. After the men leave, the women try to sleep, but most remain awake all night. In the morning, they learn that someone raided the Sargent farm, taking the two cows and most of the chickens. Pumpkin too is missing. However, the house still stands. That night a nervous Sargent family goes home to the protests of their neighbors. During the night an injured but still alive Pumpkin returns.

Cold sets in and the neighbors find it more difficult to visit one another. Marguerite is disappointed to learn the Sargents do not celebrate Christmas. On Christmas Eve, Marguerite goes outside to search for berries to give to the children. As she searches, Marguerite sings an old French Christmas carol. An Indian overhears her and approaches her. The man tells Marguerite that he was injured once and cared for by French Canadians. Marguerite gives him a button of her uncle's that she has kept on a string around her neck.

That winter proves to be far worse than anyone has predicted. The Sargent family takes to sleeping close to the fire in the main room in order to keep warm. One night, Debby, the baby, wanders to close to the fire while everyone is sleeping and her clothing catches the flame. By the time the men are able to douse the fire, Debby is in terrible pain from the burns. Marguerite convinces Caleb to cross the frozen channel with her on foot to get help from Aunt Hepsa. They make the trip successfully, though they suffer



from the cold and exhaustion, but Debby's burns are too bad. The family buries the baby the following day.

Part 3: Winter Analysis

The danger of the Indians is a constant threat. Even as the Sargents are celebrating with their neighbors, they become aware of the vulnerability of their home when Indians raid their farm and take their precious few livestock. It is a devastating blow at such a time of celebration, especially since winter is about to begin and the livestock are an important part of survival. At the same time, the reader learns another tragedy of the time period. The baby wanders too close to the fire and is burned. This tragedy is a fact of life in a world without quick medical care and a lack of modern conveniences. Children often died young in this time period.

This section of the book also shows the reader some of the work that had to be done on a daily basis that many were able to turn into a celebration. Cutting the corn from the cob can be a tedious job, but the Jordans turn it into a party by throwing a celebration for the entire neighborhood. It is also during this celebration that Abby Welles finally makes her choice between Ethan and Ira, choosing the underdog, Ira, to be her beau.



Part 4: Spring

Part 4: Spring Summary

Ira has become frustrated with the cold weather that has kept him from visiting Abby Welles. This frustration is soothed on occasion with hard work and the sweet taste of maple syrup. As soon as it is warm enough, the Sargents tap the sugar maples on their property and boil it down to make the sweet syrup and hard candy. It is a treat that breaks the monotony of the winter rations. However, this treat does not take the men's thoughts from their lack of supplies and lack of money.

Soon after taping the sugar maples, the weather clears enough that Ira can go visit Abby. Ira takes Marguerite along so that she might show Abby how to make decorative stitches on the new dresses she is making. Abby shows off the pretty material Timmy brought back to her after his voyage to the city. When she leaves, Marguerite asks for and receives some of the leftover scraps of that material to make a dress for the children's doll.

Neighbors begin visiting again. One afternoon a ship comes into their channel. The ship, *Fortunate Star*, has lost one of its crew and are seeking a man to take his place. Ira quickly volunteers, hoping the wages will help resupply their lost stores and begin a nest egg to build his own home so that he might marry Abby. Caleb wants to go as well and the captain of the ship agrees, despite the doubts of the crew. This leaves no one but Joel Sargent to clear the fields and watch over the new, meager plantings. Marguerite helps where she can, but her determination is not enough to match the work of two men.

One day, while clearing a field alone, a tree falls on Joel's leg. Dolly and Marguerite are able to get him back to the house and splint the leg, but he begins running a fever and becomes delirious. Marguerite wants to go to Sunday Island for help, but Dolly will not allow it without a man to escort her. The next day Marguerite plans to hang a white sheet to let the Jordans know they need help, but the fog is so heavy there is no point. For several days Dolly cares for Joel alone while Marguerite cares for the children. Finally Marguerite asks Dolly if she can gather seaweed that Aunt Hepsa once told her would help an injury.

When Marguerite and the children are done gathering their seaweed, they hear noises in the woods. Marguerite sees people moving in the cove below them. It is a large group of Indians. They return to the house and tell Dolly what is happening. One of the children suggest they get down the guns, but there are not enough bullets to defend the house. Marguerite decides that they should make an offering of food to the Indians to show they mean them no harm. Dolly is against this, but Marguerite insists. However, the food runs out quickly. It is then Marguerite thinks of the maypole.



Marguerite takes a red cloth she got from Abby and a white sheet of Dolly's and shreds them, hanging the strips from a pole on the beach. Marguerite then shows the children and the Indians how to dance the maypole. This fascinates the Indians until the pole finally collapses. Marguerite and the children rush back to the house where they run into the Indian Marguerite met on Christmas Eve. He reassures them and gestures for them to return to the house. The Indians quickly leave.

The Jordans come a short time later, brought to the Sargents by the flashes of white on the maypole. They are told the story and are amazed with Marguerite's courage. Aunt Hepsa gives Marguerite her Delectable Mountains quilt pieces and promises to come back and show her how to quilt it when the pieces have been sewn together. Marguerite is touched by this gesture.

Weeks later Joel is nearly healed and Ira and Caleb return. The sailors have brought gifts for everyone. Ira and Caleb give Marguerite a box with a bird on it, something Caleb insisted Marguerite would like better than cloth and sewing needles. On the day the Fortunate Star is to sail for Canada, Joel Sargent tells Marguerite that they will give her her freedom and allow her to sail to Quebec on the Fortunate Star. After some thought, however, Marguerite decides she would rather remain with the Sargent family.

Part 4: Spring Analysis

Throughout the book, from the moment the Sargent family came to their new farm there has been talk of Indian attacks. Finally in this section of the book the Indians come. However, Marguerite is a bright and intelligent young girl who realizes the Indians are simply afraid of the unknown. Marguerite approaches them and shows them that they mean them no harm, creating a situation that saves the family from losing the last of their meager belongings and their lives.

Marguerite is a young girl, but she is strong and willing to do just about anything to protect herself and those she loves. Marguerite was treated badly by the Sargent family in the beginning, especially by Caleb, but it is clear by the end of the story that the family has come to love Marguerite as one of their own. In fact, Caleb's gift to Marguerite of the box with the bird on it shows that he has come to see her as a special, beautiful girl, not just the annoying French girl bought to help with the children. This suggests a good future for Marguerite with this family despite their differences.

Life goes on in the world in which Marguerite lives and no one learns it quicker or better than Marguerite herself. A child has died and the Indians have attacked, but in the end it all turned out well. Survivors are the ones who live long enough to populate this wild land and Marguerite will clearly be one of those.



Characters

Marguerite Ledoux

Marguerite Ledoux is a young child when her uncle decides to move to Canada where he hopes to teach dance to a group of French citizens who have relocated there. On the ship from their home in Le Havre, Marguerite's uncle tells her of his dreams, even explaining to her the house they will soon live in. However, within sight of land, one of the crew members becomes ill. Soon Marguerite's uncle becomes ill as well, dying on the small ship. Out of fear that the illness will spread, the captain throws all of the uncle's belongings over the side of the ship and drops Marguerite and her grandmother off at a port in the new colonies instead of their intended destination in Canada. A short time later, Marguerite's grandmother also dies, leaving Marguerite without relatives or money for her support. Marguerite is then bound out to a family who promise to provide for her in return for her services.

The family who have taken Marguerite in have recently bought a farm on the coast of Massachusetts. The farm turns out to be on a piece of land the Indians of Canada consider sacred. For this reason, there is no longer a house on the land. The neighbors beg the family not to settle there, but they do anyway. Marguerite finds herself working hard to help the family build their new home despite the lack of supplies and the danger that hangs over their heads. In time Marguerite proves herself to be quite brave, twice saving the livestock from harm and saving the children from a wild bear.

Marguerite is an outsider, a French woman in a time when the colonists were fighting the French. However, Marguerite quickly befriends the members of the Sargent family as well as a number of the neighbors of their new farm. Marguerite has finally found a family and when given the choice to leave, she chooses to stay.

Dolly Sargent

Dolly Sargent is the second of Joel Sargent's wives and the mother of five of his youngest children. Dolly is a stubborn woman who is not happy with the move to the new farm. In fact, Dolly protests on a number of occasions the move to this new place. However, she remains strong beside her husband, not questioning his determination to make a go of the new homestead.

Dolly is a typical frontier woman, but she does not know much about the herbs and natural remedies often used in the treatment of injuries and illnesses. Dolly is a strong woman who does not lavish affection on her children because she knows well that a child could die at any time in the early years of their childhood. Despite this fact, Dolly refuses to burn the baby's finger to teach her to stay away from the fire. As a result, Dolly's baby climbs into the fire and dies of her burns. Dolly shows the reader then that



she has the heart of a loving mother, but that love has overlooked the dangers of her frontier life.

Joel Sargent

Joel Sargent is the patriarch of the Sargent family. Joel has placed everything he owns into buying the new farm on the coast of Massachusetts, sight unseen. Joel wants to make a success of the farm for his children. Due to this, Joel refuses to settle elsewhere when he discovers that the house promised to him was destroyed in an Indian raid. Joel is typical of men of this period, hardworking, stubborn, and determined to do what he needs to do to make a name for himself and his family in this time of discovery and expansion. To this end, Joel ignores the advice of his neighbors and carries on despite everything. In the end, Joel is injured and the land proves too much for him, but a little thirteen-year-old girl saves what he has fought for. To this end, Joel proves himself to be a kind and caring man when he gives that little girl, Marguerite, her freedom.

Ira Sargent

Ira Sargent is Joel Sargent's brother. Ira is given a section of the farm Joel has bought, but he does not have the means to build his own home on it. The need to build the home increases when he meets and decides to marry Abby Welles. Abby is being courted by another man when they first meet, but soon chooses Ira over the other young man. For this reason, Ira takes a voyage on a ship with the hopes of making some of the money he needs to make a home for his future bride.

Caleb Sargent

Caleb Sargent is Joel's son from his first wife. Caleb is a teenager, more than likely fourteen or fifteen when the novel begins. Caleb is opinionated as most boys his age, often making fun of Marguerite because of her nationality. However, as the novel continues, Caleb softens when it comes to Marguerite, especially after the night she accompanies him across the frozen channel to get Aunt Hepsa's help for burned baby Debby. In the end it is clear to the reader that Caleb cares a great deal for Marguerite and that there might be a future of happiness in store for the two of them in another book.

Aunt Hepsa

Aunt Hepsa is a woman in her seventies who lives on Sunday Island with her nephew Seth and grand-nephew Ethan. Aunt Hepsa was once married and had two sons of her own, but they all three died some time long before the opening pages of this novel. Aunt Hepsa has lived with Seth for many years, helping to raise Ethan after his own mother's death. Now Aunt Hepsa lives happily on Sunday Island dying and weaving wool as well as caring for the sick with the many natural remedies she cooks up with herbs and



plants around the island. Aunt Hepsa quickly becomes Marguerite's friend and surrogate mother, helping her every chance she gets.

Debby Sargent

Debby Sargent is Dolly Sargent's youngest child. Debby is only eight months old when the novel begins, but she soon learns to crawl then walk under the care of Marguerite. When Debby is little more than a year old, she is burned when she accidentally crawls too close to the fireplace in the middle of the night their first winter on the new farm. Debby's burns are so bad that she dies before morning.

Seth Sargent

Seth Jordan is Aunt Hepsa's nephew. Seth and his son have settled an island across from the Sargent's new farm and named it Sunday Island. Seth is a gentle, compassionate man willing to help a neighbor with anything he might need. However, Seth is the first to attempt to convince Joel Sargent of the dangers of settling on land that is known to be sacred to the northern Indians.

Ethan Jordan

Ethan Jordan is Seth's son. Ethan is a young man, probably in his mid to late twenties. Like his father, Ethan is a hardworking, compassionate man. Ethan is courting Abby Welles when the Sargents come to the area. In fact, Ethan buys Abby an expensive set of china cups when he goes into the city not long after the Sargents' arrival. However, Abby ends up choosing Ian over Ethan.

Abby Welles

Abby Welles is the young daughter of another family settled along the channel where the Sargents have bought their farm. Before the Sargents arrive, Abby is being actively courted by Ethan Jordan. Abby and Ethan are two of the few young people in the area and it is only a matter of practicality that they would seek one another out. However, when Ira Sargent arrives he quickly begins courting Abby as well. In time, Abby chooses Ira and they plan to marry when Ira can build a home of their own on his small section of the Sargent farm.



Objects/Places

China Cups

Ethan buys Abby expensive china cups on a trip to get supplies as a show of affection. However, Abby chooses to marry Ira Sargent over Ethan Jordan.

Homespun Dress

Marguerite grows increasingly embarrassed of her homespun dress as she quickly outgrows it in a matter of a year.

Ring and Button

Marguerite wears a ring of her grandmother's and a button of her uncle's on a cord around her neck. These are the only mementos of her past that Marguerite still has.

Calico Bush

Calico bush is another name for sheep laurel, a type of flower that grows on Sunday Island.

Corncob Doll

The young children in Marguerite's care share a corncob doll.

Cornmeal

One of the staples of the Sargent family's menu during the long winter is cornmeal. Dolly often makes a type of pudding out of this that is more than likely a version of grits.

Sugar Maples

The Sargents have a pair of sugar maple trees on their land. When spring comes, they tap the trees and take its sap to boil down and make syrup out of. This is a wonderful change of pace after months of cornmeal, salt fish, and turnips.



Maypole

Marguerite creates a maypole to distract the Indians so that they might not attack the family.

Delectable Mountains

Delectable Mountains is the name of a quilt pattern that Aunt Hepsa tells Marguerite about. At the end of the novel, Aunt Hepsa gives the quilt to Marguerite to finish and put aside for the day she marries.

Dory

A dory is a small boat the Sargents and others living near them use to move between islands.

Isabella B

Isabella B is the name of the boat the Sargent family travels on to reach their new farm.

Fortunate Star

The Fortunate Star is a large ship that comes to the Sargent's point looking for a man to replace a member of their crew. This is an opportunity for Ira to make money to replenish the family's supplies and save for his future home with Abby.



Themes

Strength of Character

Marguerite is still a young child when her grandmother and uncle, her only family after the death of her parents, decide to migrate to Canada. Marguerite's uncle is full of dreams for their future, but these dreams die when he and the grandmother both die within months of one another. Marguerite finds herself all alone at the age of twelve with no family or money to care for her. Marguerite is sold to a family who promise to provide for her in exchange for her help with their home and children.

Marguerite is French in a time when the colonists and England are struggling against the French. Marguerite is treated as though she is Indian, as though her birth makes her unworthy of the love and respect other people deserve. Marguerite must deal with this prejudice from everyone, including the family that has pledged to take her in. Marguerite does not allow this to stop her, however. Marguerite works hard and cares for the small children given into her capable hands as though they are her own family. In fact, Marguerite places her own life in danger on several occasions in order to aid this family.

Marguerite is a strong and capable girl. Marguerite has survived some of the most devastating events a person can face and survived. Marguerite is told she has grit. The reader sees that Marguerite has more than grit, she is a pure soul, someone who knows what is right and wrong and does not allow hate or fear color her actions.

History

The novel is set in the 1740s, thirty years before the American Revolution that would mark the birth of this country. This is a time in history that was fraught with danger. Families would come to America seeking freedoms from some of the oppressions in other countries and to make a fresh start in a new world. In America there was land just waiting to be settled by the right family. Anyone who was strong enough and eager enough could make his claim on hundreds of acres and become a rich farmer. It is this dream that brings the Sargent family to the coast of Massachusetts in this novel.

Marguerite too has come to America as part of this desire to find fortune. Marguerite's uncle wants to resettle in Quebec, where there is a community of French speaking people. Marguerite's uncle tells her of all the riches waiting for them in a place where he can teach his music and dance. However, this dream dies before it even begins and Marguerite finds herself alone in a colony that hates the French because of the struggles between her country and England.

History is an important theme of this novel because it defines the characters and it defines the plot. Marguerite is an unwanted element in a family attempting to face the wilds of the new world and survive. Somehow they all manage to survive together despite the dangers and their hatred of one another as well as their hatred of the



Indians. In fact, they all suffer the same pain and come to a place where they discover that they are all in the same struggle together. It is an important book that gives readers a glimpse of what it must have been like for our own ancestors.

Family

Marguerite has lost her entire family to death. Aunt Hepsa too has lost those she loves to death. Somehow these two women meet and become friends, drawing from one another the love and understanding they both crave.

Dolly Sargent is a hard woman in a world where a woman has to be hard to survive. However, Dolly adores her children to the point where she refuses to burn her baby to protect her from the fire. Dolly appears to have little care for the children, but when Debby is burned and dies, Dolly is devastated.

Joel and Ira fight hard to create a farm that will make a life for them and their family. The two men do all they can to survive and luck is on their side often enough that they do. If not for family, these two men would probably never come to this land and never have fought so hard to make the farm work. It is for this reason that family is a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The novel is told in the third person point of view. The main narrator is Marguerite, a young French woman who is a bound-out girl to the Sargent family. The author tells her story completely from the eyes of Marguerite, never drifting into the thoughts or emotions of the other characters. There are points in the novel in which the author's voice occasionally comes through, giving the reader the impression of another voice or character, but these moments are few.

The point of view of this novel is not as close to the narrating character as modern readers might be accustomed to. The narration is not completely omniscient, keeping the reader from the intimacy common to this point of view. For this reason, the author is able to move around in time quickly and to keep the reader from becoming too close to the main character at times when it is not important to the plot. However, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot because Marguerite lives a life that can be crippling emotionally; therefore, some emotional distance between reader and character is important.

Setting

The novel is set in 1743. The novel begins in Marblehead and moves up the coast of Massachusetts. The time period is thirty years before the American Revolution; therefore, the area in which the Sargents move is still wild and a part of the territory that the Indians have claimed for generations. This setting creates a dangerous situation for the family compounded by the fact that the land where their farm is located is considered sacred to the Indians.

The setting of this novel is important to the plot because the tension caused by the setting creates the conflict that propels the novel. Not only this, but the fact that England and France are involved in conflict adds to the difficulties that Marguerite faces as she makes her life with the Sargent family in Massachusetts. Finally, the setting creates the one conflict that the reader anticipates the entire novel, an assault by the Indians. Although this event does not end as anticipated, the expectation of it propels the plot throughout the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. Although the setting is the mid 1740s, the author has kept her language modern. The novel is written for young children, so the novel's language is simple enough for these young readers to understand the events of the plot.



The language of this novel is appropriate to the plot because it fits the intended audience. The language includes some words that might not be familiar to the modern reader, but these words are few and far between. Not only this, but the author often explains these words within the text through its use or in dialogue. The author also uses straightforward language that does not include a lot of metaphor or simile and so there is little to confuse a young reader.

Structure

The novel is divided into four parts, each labeled for a season of the year. The author tells her story in a linear fashion, telling the reader what happens to the characters over the course of a single year. The story is told in both exposition and dialogue. There is a great deal of exposition because so much time passes in the novel, but the author is careful to tell the important events of the novel with well written scenes.

The novel includes one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows French girl Marguerite as she attempts to survive as a bound-out girl with the Sargent family. One of the subplots follows the courting of Abby Welles by both Ira Sargent and Ethan Jordan. Another subplot follows the building relationship between Marguerite and Aunt Hepsa. Both the main plot and all the subplots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"1743 and a fine June morning. Blue water from the southwest, and Marguerite Ledoux taking her last sight of Marblehead as she crouched at the low railing of the Isabella B."

Part 1: Summer, p. 3

"All Uncle Pierre's belongings had been flung into the sea with him, even the precious violin and bow, so she and Grand'mere had nothing but their clothes and the little money bag with its few remaining coins."

Part 1: Summer, p. 8

"She caught her lips between her teeth lest Caleb should hear her crying with the pain."

Part 1: Summer, p. 21

"These savages could not all be so terrible if a Baron of France had taken one for his wife. Of that she felt certain."

Part 1: Summer, p. 37

"Seeing her fresh dress and white knitted stockings, Marguerite hung back, more than ever conscious of her own bare feet and the dingy, bedraggled Holland dress she had already half outgrown."

Part 2: Fall, p. 75

"Once again she saw it as a watery highway going round and round the world, and once more she quickened to the fancy."

Part 2: Fall, p. 89

"It had seemed so natural and easy and right to dance to Seth's fiddle. Why must they think ill of her for it?"

Part 3: Winter, p. 127

"Though the immediate danger of an Indian raid had waned, the whole household still kept sharp lookout, and Joel and Ira decided not to risk another search for the cave and its secret."

Part 3: Winter, p. 139

"Years afterwards Marguerite could not recall Debby's little voice saying her name without wanting to cry, for that very night as they lay sleeping her cries and Pumpkin's barks were to rouse them."

Part 3: Winter, p. 150

"The spring thaw was a long while in coming."

Part 4: Spring, p. 163

"It was strange in the log house and clearing when Ira and Caleb had sailed away on



the Fortunate Star."

Part 4: Spring, p. 181

"How could she go away, with the blue and buff quilt unfinished and all the summer's wool to be spun and woven? If she went now she would not see the laurel grow pink in the upper pasture, nor hear again the ballad of 'Calico Bush.'"

Part 4: Spring, p. 212



Topics for Discussion

Who is Marguerite? What nationality is she? How did she come to be in the American colonies? Why is she with the Sargents? What is a bound-out girl? Is Marguerite happy to be with the Sargents in the beginning of the novel? How about at the end of the novel? Who does Marguerite meet on Sunday Island? What does this person teach Marguerite? What does this person give to Marguerite at the end of the novel?

Who is Dolly Sargent? How does she treat Marguerite? Why? How does Dolly feel about moving to the farm? How does Dolly treat her children? Why does she do this? Why does Dolly refuse to burn the fingers of her youngest child? Why should she do this? What happens when she does not? What does this say about Dolly as a mother?

Why does Joel Sargent bring his family to a farm on the Massachusetts coast? What does he hope to find there? What does he find? Why do the neighbors warn him to settle elsewhere? Why does he not heed their advice? What happens as the Sargents settle this land? Do their neighbor's predictions come true?

Who is Ira Sargent? Why does he come to his brother's new farm? What does Ira hope to do there? Who does Ira want to marry? Why does this woman not make a decision until after Ira has courted her for a while? When does she make her decision? What prompts this decision? What is delaying the marriage? Why?

Who are the Jordans? Why did they name their home Sunday Island? Who lives there? Why did the Jordans not want the Sargents to settle on their point? What do they do with the wool they take from the Sargents' sheep? How? Who helps them? What is a corn-shucking bee? What is done there? Who plays the violin? Who sings? What is sung?

How do the Sargents get to their new farm? Where do they live until their house is built? What is a Raising? What happens the day of the Raising? What does Marguerite think of the Raising? What happens the day of the Raising that the neighbors think is a curse to the new home? Does this curse come true? In what way?

Discuss the setting. When is the novel set? Where is it setting? Why is this important? How does the setting impact the plot of the novel? How might the novel be different if it were set in a different period? How might Marguerite's life be different if the novel were set in a different time or if she had been born in a different country?