The Seven Magpies Short Guide

The Seven Magpies by Monica Hughes

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Overview

"It's an excellent school and you'll soon make lots of friends." With those words, Maureen Frazer's mother puts the fourteen-year-old on a train from Saint Andrews to a small town near the Highlands. It is September 14, 1939, and Maureen is off to Logan Academy for Young Ladies, relocated in an isolated hunting lodge because of the war which is just beginning. Her father has already been called up from the reserves into active service in France, and her mother is bustling off to London to organize other volunteer WRNS, women serving in the Women's Royal Naval Reserves.

Kintray Lodge is a fine, grand house, and the headmistress is kind and efficient.

But the girls in Maureen's dorm room, the Lower Fifth form, have been together here in their school's new location for two weeks already. They have formed a secret society called the Seven Magpies. Maureen has no wish to intrude into their society, but neither does she wish to be barred from their friendship by the haughty Kathleen, form prefect and leader of the Magpies.

Maureen ends up walking alone on a berry-picking outing, when the others leave her to discuss their society. Walking on the moor, she finds an ancient stone carved in the shape of a head, hidden in the burn (a stream). Maureen leaves a handful of berries on a stone in front of the carved head, moved by respect her father taught her for traditions. She walks on and near the ocean she finds an ancient standing stone, which looks frightening rather than watchful, like the carved head.

Maureen tries to forget her loneliness and rejection by the other girls in the library of the hunting lodge. When letters arrive on Mondays, she asks one girl (Shelagh) to show her photographs of her many relatives, especially her favorite cousin. In midOctober, Shelagh is upset by a letter telling that her favorite cousin has been killed when his navy battleship was sunk, and asks Maureen to walk with her. She will not discuss the standing stone when they pass it, or a huge wooden door padlocked and set into the hillside. They also find a wire rabbit snare, but do not realize until much later that the factor shoots rabbits instead of snaring them.

When the Lower Fifth form is sent to bring a message to the house of the factor, who caretakes the grounds of the hunting lodge, Maureen goes along and makes friends with the wife of the factor. Invited back for another visit, Maureen learns from Mrs. MacDougall an old counting rhyme about magpies, "the telling bird," as Mrs. MacDougall calls them. It is clear that the woman had shared this rhyme with Kathleen and the other girls on an earlier visit, and they have taken it for the name of their secret society.

Reluctantly, the other girls allow her to join their secret society, but to do so Maureen must take a sacrifice of meat and fruit to the standing stone. She takes an apple from the staff common room and finds a rabbit, dead in a wire snare. As she creeps out under the full moon, Maureen does not feel any spiritual union with the standing stone,

but rather that it emanates negative powers, not affirming ones. Maureen completes her task, much to the chagrin of Kathleen who tries to use the disappearance of the sacrifice by morning to her own benefit and to maintain her power over the group.

Belonging to the Magpies has not solved all of Maureen's problems. Kathleen is as nasty as ever, and the others are too intimidated to be friendly to her. Feeling the need to be alone, Maureen goes back to visit the stone face which lies waiting in the burn.

She tries to imagine herself back in time when the stone was placed in the brook, and as she gazes about her she sees something moving in the bracken: a shadowy figure with red hair and an old tweed jacket.

Could it be a German spy? Should she tell the headmistress? However, Kathleen wants the Magpies to search for the supposed spy themselves.

Maureen decides to consult Mrs. MacDougall about the red-haired man and is told that he is probably a poacher. She also learns that the padlocked door is an old icehouse. Later Shelagh and Maureen find the icehouse unlocked and the buried skin of a dead rabbit. Maureen goes to tell the MacDougalls and sees two soldiers leaving their cottage. The MacDougalls are curt with her, even after hearing her news.

When food goes missing from the school pantry, the Magpies go searching for other clues, finding footprints and the stone head.

Next to it is a gold coin Maureen recognizes from the MacDougalls' cottage, and she takes it back to Mrs. MacDougall. She has guessed that the red-haired man is their son Jimmy, deserted from the army. But she cannot promise Mrs. MacDougall that she will not tell her headmistress about him, hiding out on the estate.

Walking back to school, Maureen suddenly has a bag pulled over her head, and she is locked in the icehouse. It is hours before the Magpies figure out where she is and go to the headmistress. She and Mrs. MacDougall (who have been discussing her son) realize that the factor must have locked Maureen up to prevent her from telling until Jimmy could get away; they go for tools to break the door open. The Magpies rush to the icehouse, and Jimmy gives them a spare key to let Maureen out.

Jimmy is resolved to turn himself in, and Maureen has not been harmed. She holds no grudge against the factor and resolves to face "the duration" with what courage she can muster—her friends by her side.

About the Author

Monica Hughes was born Monica Ince in Liverpool, England, on November 3, 1925. Her parents then both worked at the University of Liverpool, her father, E. L. Ince, a Welshman, in mathematics and her mother, Phyllis Fry, an Englishwoman, in biology. A few months after young Hughes's birth, her parents left Liverpool so that her father could take up a new position as head of the department of mathematics at the new University of Cairo in Egypt.

Young Hughes's first memories are of Egypt: their first house in Heliopolis, walks in the desert with the nanny for her and her younger sister, and seeing mirages of palm trees and buildings floating in the sky. Later they lived in an apartment in Cairo, with a spectacular view of the pyramids, which they visited on weekends. Her parents climbed the Great Pyramid for the view, while the girls played with bottle caps littered in the sand at its base. "So much for history," sighed Hughes in Something about the Author Autobiography Series. She still remembers little lizards, birds of prey, and the wind-blown sand; these and other memories became elements in her novels Sandwriter and The Promise.

The Ince family returned to England in 1931 so the girls could attend school in a suburb of London. Hughes was pleased and excited by the exposure to music and a wider range of books, particularly Norse mythology and the works of E. Nesbit. For a while she wanted to be an archaeologist and Egyptologist, but seeing Boris Karloff in the film The Mummy gave her nightmares for weeks and put an end to that ambition.

When the Ince family moved to Edinburgh in 1936, Hughes found refuge from the plain, cold city and boring school by borrowing books from the nearby Carnegie library. She plunged into the dramas of nineteenth-century writers and the works of Jules Verne. All her small allowance went on hardcover blank books in which she would write exciting titles and "Chapter One." Then she would sit and dream of being a famous writer. That and a journal kept when she went on vacations was all the writing she did at that time.

When the Second World War began in 1939, Hughes and her sister were sent away from the intense Nazi bombing, first to an isolated hunting lodge in Scotland and later to a boarding school in Harrogate, not far from the Yorkshire moors where the Bronte sisters had lived. There she was encouraged to write fiction, as well as essays and compositions.

After her father died, Hughes could no longer plan to go to Oxford; Edinburgh University was the best the family could afford. At age sixteen she began an honors mathematics degree, though the English lecturers were far more interesting to her.

At eighteen, she volunteered for service in the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), was sent down to London, and spent two years working with thousands of other Wrens, as women who served in the WRNS were called, on the secret project of breaking the

German code. Every free moment she had, Hughes spent in the gallery of the New Theatre watching ballet.

After the war, Hughes transferred into meteorology, first in Scotland and then Belfast, where she was delighted to find food rationing a thing of the past. When she left the WRNS in 1946, she lived in Chelsea with her mother and sister. For a few years she worked freelance as a dress designer, before taking a friend's advice and traveling to visit South Africa and Rhodesia (now called Zimbabwe). She lived and worked with that friend's sister and husband for two years, making first-run dresses for a local factory and later working in a bank.

Her journey to Africa and back stayed long in her memory, and her experiences filtered into many of the books she would later write.

Living once again with her mother and sister in an unheated London apartment got her thinking about the sun. Australia seemed to be the place to emigrate, but the waiting list was three years long. Hughes left for Canada instead, in April of 1952, intending to work her way across to the west coast and pick up a ship across the Pacific to Australia. Working in Ottawa, Ontario, in the National Research Council, she began writing stories to combat the loneliness she felt.

At a writing class at the YMCA she met a woman who became her best friend in Canada and who introduced Hughes to Glen Hughes, who became her husband in 1957.

The Hughes lived in Ontario, moving from Cornwall, to Toronto, and then London with Glen's work. Monica Hughes began writing again in the late evening and early morning, as well as caring for their four children. When the youngest was a week old in 1964, they moved to Edmonton, Alberta, driving on the new Trans Canada Highway across the seemingly endless prairies—a trip that she remembered twelve years later when writing her novel Earthdark, and which brings to mind the colonists' journey to Isis in The Keeper of the Isis Light.

This began a furiously creative time for Hughes: she painted in oils, embroidered wall hangings, wove tapestries, and wrote, but never sold a single short story, article, or novel.

With the death of her mother and sister, and as her children grew older, Monica Hughes had few touchstones to her past memories. In 1971 she resolved to spend a year writing for four hours each day. She read armloads of books by the best writers for young people. After some unfruitful efforts, she was inspired by a Jacques Cousteau movie The Silent World to begin her novel Crisis on Conshelf Ten. In 1974 it was accepted by a British publisher, who asked for another story about the lead character.

Since then, Hughes has written over thirty books for young people. Her works have been translated into over a dozen languages.

Though she did eventually tour Australia and New Zealand in 1990 with her husband, she feels firmly settled in Canada with her husband, grown children, and grandchildren. In the winter of 2001, with new projects in hand, she fully intends to write as long as she possibly can.

Setting

The novel opens in Scotland, two weeks into September, 1939, as the Second World War is beginning. Maureen and everyone she meets expects the duration of the war to be several months at most.

Monica Hughes needed to do no research on the setting for this novel. "It was all in my memory," she said in a personal interview. "At the start of the Second World War my school, in Edinburgh, was evacuated to a hunting lodge on a sea loch in Argyll, in the western Highlands." All that Maureen sees on her journey from Edinburgh and at Kintray Lodge that is now her school, is based on the author's own experiences.

Throughout the novel, as in all her novels, Hughes offers details of the Highland landscape, the grand building that is now the school, and the humble factor's cottage.

She explains the children's clothing, from school uniforms to the factor's boots and the red-haired man's brogues, and food, all of which combine to create clear and intense images. The peaty taste of water that Maureen drinks, cupped in her hands from a burn, is described for the reader so clearly that it is easy to understand the author has many vivid memories from living in Scotland. The sphagnum moss that carpets boggy places in the hilly, rocky ground is collected by the schoolgirls, as are wild berries on the day Maureen finds a stone head in the burn.

Hughes even includes the details of boarding house food, never very good and the quantity was restricted as well, for the duration of the war. Plain vanilla pudding with almost no flavor is called in the novel, as it was in a boarding school Hughes attended in Harrogate, Sally-before-the-bath, Sally-in-the-bath, or Sally-after-the-bath, depending on whether the pudding is colored brown, pink, or white. "But Sally always tastes exactly the same," the girls of the Lower Fifth form tell the newcomer, Maureen, at her first dinner.

Social Sensitivity

Monica Hughes has been called "Canada's finest writer of science fiction for children" by critic Sarah Ellis in Horn Book magazine. Ellis goes on to say: "There is a gentleness to her books that is rare. . . . The hairsbreadth escapes, the exotic flora and fauna, . . . the villains and the heroes—all are enclosed in one overriding concern, subtle but ever-present: the value of kindness."

The climax of this novel comes when the factor kidnaps Maureen and imprisons her in the icehouse. Maureen reacts surprisingly well. And after she has been released, she is considerate of the MacDougall family and their horror at finding their own son a deserter hiding on the laird's land.

The headmistress, Miss Priestley, said to Mrs. MacDougall: "I thank you most sincerely for coming to tell me that Maureen might be in danger.

It was brave of you to stand up to your husband like that."

"Och, I couldna have slept a wink worrying about the poor lassie." She sighed.

"A'weel, there'll be wounds to heal and it'll take time. He's a gey proud man, is MacDougall." She hesitated. "It was a foolish thing he did, but it was for the laird's honour, not just his own. You will not be holding it against him?" She looked anxiously at Miss Priestley.

The headmistress looked grave and, before she could answer, Maureen interrupted. "Please, Miss Priestley, don't tell the police or the laird. I'm all right, really.

And I'm sure he wouldn't have done it if he'd had time to think. It was just as much my fault for not telling you about my seeing Jimmy in the bracken."

"I . . . really . . . I can't think what your mother and father would say."

"But you mustn't worry them about it, must you? There's a war on." Maureen brought out this cliche triumphantly and, to her relief, saw Miss Priestley's mouth twitch in a reluctant smile.

The reader knows that the war will last several years, not months, and that Maureen or her friends may lose other relatives besides Shelagh's young cousin in the navy.

But there is a strong sense that the entire world and the weight of all the past do not revolve so dependently as Maureen once thought on the little lives of people who are newcomers to the Highlands (coming as they do from a town that is only a thousand years old). And perhaps their little games and rivalries do matter more than they thought, when lives and honor are affected.

Literary Qualities

This novel owes its vividness to being based on the author's own childhood experiences in a boarding school evacuated to a hunting lodge in the western Highlands of Scotland. On the seashore near the lodge was a standing stone. "This always gave me the shivers, though I had no idea why," Hughes said in a private interview. "I tried to exorcise this memory by writing a timetravel book set in Scotland and involving the stone." That manuscript was never published, and her need to "write out the stone" was still there.

Years later Hughes was looking through a dictionary of quotations for something else entirely, when the book fell open at a counting song she had never heard before: "The Seven Magpies." "A plot line, if ever I saw one," said Hughes. "Complete with the climax punch line: 'Seven for a secret that can ne'er be told.'" Shortly afterwards, Hughes watched a program on Vision TV with Alan Garner about Celtic traditions and religious beliefs still extant in Britain.

Suddenly everything fell into place for Hughes to write a story that would be in part her adventure at boarding school, only with a heroine who was an outsider, quite different from herself. The "Seven Magpie" rhyme became a plot outline. She needed no research for setting, but did a considerable amount of research on Celtic tradition and beliefs. She made up characters who were more varied and interesting, with more built-in conflict than the girls she was with at school. She discovered the secret society and while actually writing the book, she discovered the secret that "can ne'er be told."

This novel is in many ways linked thematically with an earlier novel by Monica Hughes, The Refuge. Published in 1989, The Refuge includes many of the same plot elements as The Seven Magpies, including, but not limited to adolescent fantasy, an absent and distant father who never writes, a mother pre-occupied with deskwork to the point where she has little attention to give her daughter, a youth who is expected to be more aggressive than her nature will allow, a wife and mother who cannot keep her husband from treating a teenager in a manner which is unnecessarily cruel and arguably criminal, a youth in trouble with the law, and rabbits (one of which is caught in a snare, killed, cooked over a campfire and its skin, full of maggots, is buried). In both novels the girl protagonist is terrified by being confined one afternoon until dark in an isolated place by a man who will not let her go free, though he intends to do her no physical harm.

Though these novels have so much in common, the tones are very different. The earlier novel is choppy and emotionally simple in comparison to The Seven Magpies, where the narrative flows on two levels: what happens inside and outside the school grounds. Inside the grounds of the hunting lodge-turned-school, the students are protected from the outside world and the beginning of the war, protected first by isolation and distance, second by their teachers and the factor who patrols the grounds, and (for Maureen's dorm mates) last by their secret society. All their concerns (and Maureen's as well) are centered on their own experiences inside this safe framework. But intrusions from outside show that the narrative is proceeding outside the school as well. Letters come to

bring concern for absent parents and grief at the loss of Shelagh's cousin and his ship. And when the redhaired man is spotted, the world outside the school intrudes in a way that cannot be ignored.

Hughes's natural writing style, which sustains all her novels, is very evident in both works, though The Seven Magpies draws on autobiographical elements from the author's own childhood, and The Refuge draws on her experiences as an adult and parent.

Themes and Characters

There are many characters in The Seven Magpies, rather more than would be expected for a young adult novel, and notably more than is usual in novels by Monica Hughes.

Maureen Frazer and her mother are introduced in the opening chapter; her father has already gone to France as a soldier.

Maureen chats with farmers and an old woman on the train, and with the bus driver and taxi driver on her way to the school.

Later she meets Mr. MacDougall, the factor who tends the land of Kintray Lodge for the absent laird, and his wife Mrs. MacDougall, who keeps their cottage. The red-haired man Maureen glimpses in the bracken is later revealed to be their son, Jimmy MacDougall. That is over a dozen characters already, not counting anyone Maureen meets at the school.

Among the school's faculty only Miss Priestley, the headmistress, and Miss Urquhart are developed as characters. They are both efficient, caring teachers who take their responsibilities for their students very seriously. Another teacher, Miss Cavanagh, and the cook have only one scene each, in dialogue with Maureen—though these are important scenes: the first early in the novel when Maureen decides out of solidarity to hide from Miss Cavanagh that Fiona is not in bed, and the second mid-way through the novel when Maureen realizes that she will not be able to sneak food out of the kitchen for an offering to the standing stone.

The Seven Magpies in the Lower Fifth form are at first a group of girls with little for Maureen to distinguish among them.

"It doesn't matter, not knowing which is which, she told herself. Only one person counts, and that's Kathleen." The form prefect Kathleen is a bossy girl, with posh and imperious manners. Shelagh is the one girl who looks from the first like she could become a friend to Maureen, and she does.

The others are described as Fiona, a plump girl with a tendency to giggle, and Alison, Eileen, Peggy, and Moira; the latter two chum together and are not much different, either from each other or Alison and Eileen.

This does not seem to be intended to make these characters faceless nor to suggest that they do not matter—rather, the author seems to have intended to make them identifiably a group and also resemble the girls Maureen was used to meeting at her earlier school back home in Edinburgh. These also seem to be girls much like a reader would find in a novel by Enid Blyton, set in a boarding school.

Following Kathleen's example, the Magpies strive for in most of the novel to use the "Englishy," educated accent of their teachers, rather than the Scots accent they learned

growing up in Edinburgh and which they return to when relaxed. As their story comes to an end, the girls are bossed less by Kathleen and are using their natural Scots accents, and this seems part and parcel of their better behavior as they become good friends with Maureen. It is precisely Maureen's individuality and strength that allow her finally to belong to the Magpies, and allows them not to be intimidated by her differences and independence.

As important as any of the human characters are the two ancient stones found on the property of the hunting lodge. One is a carved head, hidden from casual view in the burn, and the other is a standing stone, set near the shore. The carved head is interesting, and Maureen feels moved to leave small offerings before it, but the standing stone is not so pleasant to be near, especially at night. The offerings left by the Seven Magpies at the standing stone are more like a propitiation before a grim altar than a sharing with an image of wisdom.

Another important element in the story is the counting rhyme taught by Mrs. MacDougall to the Lower Fifth form girls, and later to Maureen as well.

One for sorrow
Two for joy
Three for a girl
Four for a boy
Five for silver
Six for gold
And seven for a secret that can ne'er be told.

From this rhyme the seven girls take the name for their secret society, which will leave an offering of meat and fruit at the standing stone on the night of the full moon, in hope that they and their families will all be preserved from harm through the coming war. Later, Maureen and the girls begin to interpret events around them in the sequence laid out by the rhyme. First came sorrow when Shelagh learned that her cousin had been killed, second came joy when Maureen's offering disappeared (Kathleen decided that the stone had "accepted" it).

The girl was Maureen, arriving at the school, and the boy was the red-haired man she saw in the bracken. When Maureen put a silver threepenny bit in front of the stone head, that was fifth in the sequence, and the gold sovereign put there by Mrs. MacDougall was sixth. And when the story is finished, Maureen realizes that the secret "that can ne'er be told" is Jimmy, hiding out near the lodge.

As fourteen year olds, the Magpies hover between childhood and adulthood. They have a natural appetite for adventure, and their secret society helps them create a sense of belonging when they have been separated from their families. It is also a way to cover and deflect real fears of the encroaching war.

In these early weeks of what would later be called the Second World War, Maureen hears rumours that there will be clothes rationing and sugar rationing and that there

may be spies even in this quiet part of Scotland, near the Highlands. It all seems exciting to Maureen, until she realizes that she will have to wear her old school's navy jacket and tunic instead of the new school's green jacket and skirt. She tries to take her tea without sugar at the home of Mrs. MacDougall, the factor's wife, until it is urged on her. And spies seem theoretical until she sees a red-haired man in a tweed jacket lurking in the bracken (near the stone head) as if he does not want to be seen.

This is a book about shadows and light and about belonging and being different, according to reviewer Jessica Higgs, writing in Resource Links. "The shadow of the war falls everywhere, but the Celtic shadows are longer still, and ultimately more powerful." As Maureen draws strength from her own individuality, as she bonds with the locals and their old ways, and as she follows her instincts to interpret the old counting rhyme, she begins to solve the mystery of the stranger on the moor.

The marvelous intrusion of the stone head as a metaphor for the constant, unchanging past into the changing present is a powerful image for Maureen and the reader.

It is a symbol of perceptiveness and benevolence. It anchors the story in place and time, connecting Maureen to the past both distant and recent. It gives hope for the uncertain future.

Topics for Discussion

1. Why has Maureen's family decided to send her to boarding school?

2. Why has the laird donated the use of his hunting lodge to Logan Academy for Young Ladies?

3. How is the war affecting the students at Logan Academy?

4. How is Maureen putting a good effort into her time with Logan Academy? What more could she do to fit in better or to make living there more pleasant? Would that be a reasonable effort?

5. When does Maureen feel that she has truly arrived at Logan Academy and feels welcome? When the taxi delivers her? When she is met by Miss Priestley? When she meets her dorm mates in Lower Fifth form? When she finds the carved stone head? On meeting Mrs.MacDougall? When she becomes a Magpie? After her release from the icehouse?

6. How important are matters of conscience to Maureen?

7. Why is it a mistake for Maureen to let Kathleen decide that Miss Priestley is not to be told about the red-haired man seen in the bracken?

8. What alternatives does Jimmy MacDougall have to serving as an infantryman?

9. What alternatives exist to military service for citizens who want to be of service to their nation or community without joining the military?

10. How much more individual do the Magpies seem when they are no longer following Kathleen's directions without question?

11. Should the confinement of Maureen in the icehouse be considered as a criminal act of unlawful confinement or more like a parent locking a child up in a quiet room for a short while? Does it matter to you when and where this incident occurred? How were children and youths commonly disciplined in 1939 Scotland as compared with your own community?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. What is the difference between a boarding school in Great Britain in 1939 and a public school in your home community? Who attended boarding schools at that time? Compare the education in boarding schools to the alternatives available then and also to the alternatives available to you. What are the major benefits and drawbacks to attending a boarding school?

2. What kind of contributions to a nation's war effort can be made by citizens in the military? By citizens who are civilians? By children and the elderly? By corporations and citizens of wealth? Are these contributions done from duty or from pride?

3. What kind of service can a citizen do in the military? How can citizens with particular talents or skills serve as well as those called up for the infantry? What alternatives exist for those who want to serve but are unsuited to combat?

4. What alternatives exist to military service for conscientious objectors? When is it proper for a citizen not to accept being drafted to serve in the military? Does it matter whether the citizen is drafted to serve in a combat role?

5. How important is an extended family to an adolescent child? Why did the author choose the character Shelagh to be the one whose cousin died? Would one of the other girls have been affected differently because they have fewer relatives? Or Maureen, because she has only parents and a grandmother?

6. Are matters of conscience as important to most people as they are to Maureen?

From where did she get her sense of what is right and wrong? Does she manage to meet her goals for moral and ethical behavior?

7. Make a map of the Kintray Lodge property that the laird has donated for the use of Logan Academy. Use contour lines to show the changing elevation from sea level to the moor. Be sure to include a legend with symbols for the items you feel are important to mark on your map. You can make guesses about matters which are not specified in the novel, but include written notes about how you have interpreted the text and where you have used your own judgement.

8. When Maureen asks her headmistress not to tell the police or the laird that the factor MacDougall locked her in the icehouse, what are her reasons? Does she want to minimize the incident since she was not harmed? Is she showing mercy and compassion to the MacDougall family? Does she understand how reprehensible MacDougall's act was? Would Maureen feel differently if the man had been a stranger? Or a poacher?

9. What are some reasons you can think of why the factor MacDougall decided to pull a bag over Maureen's head and lock her in the icehouse? If he had been unconcerned for

Maureen's well-being, what could he have done instead? If he had taken the time to think first and treat her as a responsible adult should, what could he have done instead? Should you take into consideration the year and location in which the novel is set or how MacDougall may have disciplined his own son and how Maureen may have been disciplined by her parents or teachers?

10. Make models of the two ancient stones Maureen finds at Kintray Lodge. You might use any of several modeling materials—clay, a large block of soap or wax, plaster, or papier-mache. How will you attempt to reproduce a carved stone and give an impression that it has sat outdoors near the ocean for thousands of years? Prepare copies of your preliminary sketches and of the images you find in books or on the Internet that you use to design your models.

For Further Reference

Ellis, Sarah. "News from the North." Horn Book (October 1984): 661. This article contains a positive analysis of Hughes's merit as an author of imaginative writing for young people.

Higgs, Jessica. Review of The Seven Magpies.

Resource Links (April 1997): 175-76. This review, praises the protagonist's character development. "Hughes's book is an engrossing read for those who enjoy historical fiction and mystery with a touch of supernatural. She recreates the wartime atmosphere of a girls' boarding school accurately and her characters are well defined and show growth and development."

"Monica Hughes." In Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Vol. 11. Detroit Gale, 1992. This essay provides insight into the life of this author, who has lived on four continents and written over thirty books for young adult readers. Details from her teen years show that The Seven Magpies is in many respects an autobiographical novel.

Review of The Seven Magpies, BC Report, vol.

8 (April 14,1997): 37. A positive review of the novel, praising it for integrating elements of fantasy and ancient religion into a modern realist setting, which is an unusual statement for the B. C. Report, a right-wing fundamentalist political magazine that has negatively reviewed other books dealing with religious ideas other than fundamentalist Protestant.

Review of The Seven Magpies. Quill & Quire (January 1997): 39. This review comments that, unlike much of Hughes's work, the book has no Canadian content. "From the familiar base of schoolgirl [b——]iness and boarding-school food, Hughes widens the focus to larger—international— dramas and issues of truthfulness and conscience in a world badly in need of good magic."

Van Luven, Lynne. "And Here's Novel No.

25." Edmonton Journal (February 23,1992): C4. Based on an interview, with photo, of Hughes, Van Luven assesses this local writer as famous, and rightly so for her accomplishments; and still she leads a practical, quiet life.

Related Titles/Adaptations

Readers who have enjoyed The Seven Magpies can try reading Hughes's earlier novel The Refuge to see how the author uses many of the same plot elements to produce a contemporary story with an entirely different effect upon the reader.

Other contemporary authors whose works may be enjoyed by fans of Monica Hughes are Dave Duncan (especially his three young adult novels of his series "The King's Daggers"), Eileen Kernaghan (Dance of the Snow Dragon and The Snow Queen), and Julie Lawson.

Readers who are looking for more stories set at boarding schools will find there are many similarities between The Seven Magpies and several books by British author Enid Blyton. As well, the novel The Silver Chair by C. S. Lewis is also set at a boarding school, at least for the frame of the narrative.

Related Web Sites

Monica Hughes Web Site http://www.ecn.ab.ca/mhughes Accessed March 29, 2002.

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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

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Cover Design
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)
ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)
ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature□Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction□19th century□Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction□20th century□Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3□dc20 96-20771 CIP

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996