



Isabel Feeney, Star Reporter

Beth Fantaskey

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It's 1920s Chicago—the guns-and-gangster era of Al Capone—and it's unusual for a girl to be selling the *Tribune* on the street corner. But ten-year-old Isabel Feeney is unusual . . . unusually obsessed with being a news reporter. She can't believe her luck when she stumbles not only into a real-live murder scene, but also into her hero, the famous journalist Maude Collier. The story of how the smart, curious, loyal Isabel fights to defend the honor of her accused friend and latches on to the murder case like a dog on a pant leg makes for a winning, thoroughly entertaining middle grade mystery.

Isabel Feeney, Star Reporter Details

Date : Published March 1st 2016 by HMH Books for Young Readers

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Author : Beth Fantaskey

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From Reader Review Isabel Feeney, Star Reporter for online ebook

Angie says

Isabel Feeney sells newspapers in 1920s Chicago. Her father was killed in the great war and her mother cleans at a hospital. They do not have much and Isabel helps her mother out financially. She had to leave school, but really wants to be a reporter like her hero Maude Collins. One cold evening, Isabel is the witness to a murder. Miss Giddings, one of her regular customers, and her mobster boyfriend are walking into an alley when the boyfriend is shot. Miss Giddings is quickly arrested for the murder, but Isabel doesn't believe she did it. She teams up with Maude to investigate the murder. Along the way, she makes friends with Giddings' son Robert and the mobsters daughter Flora. Isabel sticks her nose in where it doesn't belong and gets in trouble quite often, but she does find out who really killed the mobster.

Isabel is a plucky girl heroine that was fun to read about. She is poor, but has a lot of pride and ambition. She tells it like it is and doesn't always do or say the right things. I really liked her interactions with quiet, polio-stricken Robert and uppity actress Flora. The three were unlikely friends but that friendship worked. I do think the book was a tad bit long and became a bit predictable after a while. Otherwise it was an enjoyable murder mystery set in Prohibition era Chicago. You get a bit of history and a bit of mystery and a lot of fun.

Em says

After reading Beth Fantaskey's other novel, *Buzz Kill* (which happened to also be about a female journalist wanting to solve a murder), I was really excited to find out that Fantaskey had written another murder mystery type book.

I loved the spunky and fun heroine of this story, Isabel. I found that I could really relate to her. No, I don't live in the 1920s or have ever been a key witness in a murder, but I do want to be a journalist (or some sort of writer, at least) and I know what it's like to be a kid who wants to prove themselves to adults. Maude Collier is amazing. She's made her way in a world where it's tough to be a woman interested in more than housework.

Since Chapter 45, I had the murder solved (the chapters are short, so Chapter 45 is about halfway). I wish that it hadn't been so obvious to me because knowing the culprit made the book a bit less intriguing after Chapter 45. There were times when I really just wanted to shout at Isabel for not picking up on what I had noticed, but, luckily, she figures it out before it's too late.

Overall, this novel by Beth Fantaskey is a great mystery for all ages and wonderful inspiration for girls like me, especially since it was inspired by the real lives of five journalists from the 1920s.

I'm looking forward to more books by this author!

Chance Lee says

Isabel Feeney is a grubby little newsie in Prohibition Era Chicago. She's poor, cold, and struggling, but she's plucky, so you know everything is going to turn out okay. On a windy night, she hears a gunshot and finds a dead body. It's the fiancée of one her nice customers, who just couldn't be a merry murderess, could she?

When the press and the popo show up to investigate, Isabel decides she'll solve the case and write about it, like her favorite reporter, Maude Collier, who is like Christine Baranski's character in *Chicago*

The book's plot picks up fast. All the above happens in less than sixty pages. However, the characters are predictable and the writing lacks the zingy bite of a Chicago winter. Characterizations are trite. Isabel wears her dead dad's hand-me-down clothes, signifying how poor she is. Her hair is a mess! And worse -- it's brown, the bane of mousy girls everywhere. Her house is also messy, furniture doesn't match, etc. No unique personality.

Chapters almost always end on cliffhangers, which is also predictable. It also prevents chapters from closing on emotional beats, which would have helped emphasize the grittiness of 1920s Chicago. Lacking emotion, the story feels safe. A young girl witnesses a murder, but there is no sense of danger.

If the Chicago of that era were a playground with sharp edges, a hot metal slide, and jagged rocks, this book is the rubber coating over anything that seems remotely harmful. It's a Chicago without vice, without danger, without jazz.

The book features a statistical anomaly -- a female newsie who wants to be a writer. As Maude tells Isabel, female writers -- who don't cover fashion -- are rare at that time. But it's 2017! Simply having a "strong female protagonist" isn't enough. Just over the past few months, I read some fantastic books for this age group with complex, layered girl heroes. This book, sadly, feels like a book that talks down to kids. This pair of sentences did me in: "He looked about as happy to see me as I was to see him. Which wasn't happy at all."

Wow. Thanks for explaining.

I flipped to the end, which was just as I expected -- safe, predictable, jazzless.

Aubrey Castonguay says

great mystery book.

Jaime says

3.5

This is a solid, better than most, mystery for kids (especially girls) set in prohibition-Era Chicago. The author does a great job capturing the time and place and casts her story with a diverse group of characters. The protagonist is spunky, ambitious, and not afraid to speak her mind.

Fantanaskey does a great job of incorporating social issues into the book - women's rights, children vs. career, poor children working instead of attending school - without getting didactic or offering any opinions.

It's also great to see a good stand-alone title in a sea of series books. My one complaint, tho, is the length. It did feel a little on the long side for a book for this age group. The chapters are quite short (average length was prob. 3 pages) which does make the book read quickly. Make sure to offer to kids that are already solid readers.

Great for fans of the Al Capone series by Choldenko.

Panda Incognito says

Apparently everyone loves this book, but I found it outrageously unbelievable. I couldn't stop sighing and rolling my eyes over the absurd scenarios and how modern the dialogue sounded. What bothered me most of all was how the impoverished main character seemed like a privileged kid from 2016; no reality of hardship affected her behaviors, thoughts, or expectations for the future. I was not impressed, but I'll be charitable and give a third star because the plot included some striking historical details and approaches the time period from an angle unrepresented in juvenile fiction.

J says

The title character, Isabel Feeney, can best be described as plucky. For a kid who is stuck selling newspapers in the 1920s Chicago just to make ends meet for her and her mother, Isabel has big dreams of one day selling the news in a different way: by reporting it. She gets her chance after inadvertently getting caught up in the murder of a small-time gangster. Along the way Isabel finds that first appearances can be deceiving (sometimes) and that following her dream is worthwhile if dangerous.

The short chapters are fairly informative and keep the pace of the book quick, good considering this middle grade book is just over 300 pages. Sometimes Fantaskey keeps things a little too simple, but I suppose that's okay since the target age group needs the encouragement of reading into the clues rather than the challenge all the way through. The story is a bit idealistic, but the characters are interesting and have some depth, even when they're mostly absent. A fairly good middle grade mystery that can be enjoyed by parents as well as kids.

Note: ARC received via Amazon Vine in exchange for review.

The Library Lady says

I was amused by someone here who castigated this book for not espousing 2016 views on women and on the disabled. But this is NOT a book about 2016, it's about the 1920s, and Fantaskey does a pretty good job of recreating Chicago in the age of gangsters and the sort of glamorous women who killed as depicted in the musical "Chicago." Isabel is spunky as they come, with a gosh darn sort of manner that is a bit over the top, but kid readers will enjoy her adventure. This would get 3.5 if GoodReads ever allowed it.

Martha says

Ten-year-old Isabel, is a newsgirl selling papers in Chicago during the crime filled 1920's when prohibition kept criminals, especially Al Capone's crew busy working around the law. While Isabel is out selling newspapers, she witnesses a murder involving one of her favorite elegant customers. Since Isabel's true goal is to become a news reporter just like her heroine the famous and well respected Maude Collier, who works for the Chicago Tribune, Isabel automatically follows the sound of a gun shot, fearing for her customer life. Inspired by the lives of five real female reporters who wrote for the Chicago Tribune in the 1920's, the

historical setting shares true details such as young Isabel's visit to the real Murderess Row at the Cook County Jail, to investigate. This is an exciting historical mystery with a scrappy heroine, whose impulsive nature often puts her in harms way. Readers who love detective stories won't be able to put this suspenseful winner down.

Karen Arendt says

Isabel is smart, courageous, and a good friend. The story is exciting, set in the gangster era of Chicago's 1920s. The short chapters end with readers wanting to go to the next chapter, almost like a cliffhanger. It's a great story for girls who have ambitions of pursuing careers in the male dominated field.

Noah Carpenter says

A young girl who has to roam for money for her mom and her. Isabel was just selling news papers when she heard a gun shot she ran towards the shot and saw her best friend holding a dead body. Will Mrs.Giddings be accused of the murder.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC from Edelweiss Above the Treeline

Isabel's mother is struggling financially in 1920s Chicago after the death of Isabel's father in The Great War. Isabel sells newspapers, hoping to bring in a little money to augment her mother's salary as a cleaning lady at a hospital, but secretly hopes to be a news reporter like the glamorous Maude Collier. After a salesgirl who gives Isabel extra money for the papers is accused of shooting her mobster boyfriend, Isabel meets Maude and starts her own investigation. She befriends not only the son of the salesgirl, but the daughter of the mobster, and spend a lot of time running around the mean streets of Chicago looking for clues. Maude isn't exactly what Isabel envisioned, and the police are too thrilled with having an urchin sticking her nose into their investigation, but Isabel is able to crack the case when they are not.

Strengths: This had lots of good details about the time period, and about the importance of newspapers at the time. This had A Tree Grows in Brooklyn vibe with the difficulties of poverty that Isabel faced without being as slow paced as that wonderful book. I enjoyed the details about so many things, AND my students will love that it is a murder mystery.

Weaknesses: A little long, and doesn't have a great cover. I'll buy anyway, but a little more revision and a better cover would make this easier to sell!

What I really think: Murder mysteries are always in demand for middle grade, but it's hard to find convincing ones. This worked, and maybe students will learn some 1920s history while satisfying their bloodlust! A great nonfiction companion for this would be Blumnethals' Tommy: The Gun that Changed America.

Valerie says

I LOVE MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS ABOUT PLUCKY GIRLS INVESTIGATING MURDERS AND WANT A MILLION MORE OF THEM.

Ava says

Great book. Full of action and mystery. I recommend it.

Gisbelle says

My thanks to *HMH Books for Young Readers*

Point of View: Single (Isabel)

Writing: First Person | Past Tense

Setting: Chicago, Illinois

Genre: Middle Grade | Mystery

This book is about a ten-year-old newspaper girl who has (sort of) witnessed a murder. She then tries to find out the truth behind this mess.

I enjoyed reading this book. **It was actually pretty hilarious.** At times though I thought it was a tad bit too slow with one too many irrelevant scenes. Still, I ended up liking this book, even I didn't fall head over heel in love with it.

Isabel was a delightful character. I usually don't like reading books with characters in such a young age because they normally find a way to annoy me. It wasn't a problem here. Isabel was funny, but not in a know-it-all, obnoxious way that I typically dislike. I loved her bravery and fierceness, which led her into trouble. Most of the time, I felt sorry for her for having to live in poverty, but Isabel seemed strong enough to withstand such hardship.

What interested me the most about this book is the fact that it was inspired by the real lives in the 1920s and I did learn a lot about the way people lived during that period. It's amazing how eminently lives have changed since then.

Generally, I think the mystery was well thought out. I did have a hard time guessing the real culprit. How the mystery came to an end was a great surprise.

All in all, this book is a good one to read. I enjoyed most of the book, except for the fact that it was a little to slow for my taste. However, I think younger readers will enjoy this book more that I did.
