



War Brothers: The Graphic Novel

By Sharon E. McKay

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The unforgettable story of a child soldier. When fourteen-year-old Jacob is brutally abducted and forced to become a child soldier, he struggles to hold on to his sanity and the will to escape. Daniel Lafrance's striking artwork and the poignant, powerful text capture the very essence of life as a child soldier. Readers will never forget the experiences of this young boy struggling to survive, unsure who to trust, afraid of succumbing to madness, and above all, desperate to get to freedom. In the end, Jacob engineers a daring escape. This graphic novel is based on the acclaimed novel of the same title, winner of a 2009 Arthur Ellis award. The author spent time in Uganda and based this story on real-life accounts of the horrors inflicted on child soldiers and their victims. This is a story of unthinkable violence, but also one of hope, courage, friendship, and family.

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War Brothers: The Graphic Novel By Sharon E. McKay Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 8 Up—A graphic version of the 2008 novel in which Jacob describes how he and Ugandan schoolmates were captured by Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, forced to serve as slaves and child soldiers, and finally escaped. The black-bordered illustrations of the boys' captivity, featuring numerous anguished faces, add to this powerful story's emotional force. © Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

From [Booklist](#)

Jacob and his friends, Paul, Tony, and Norman, are safely tucked away at a well-guarded boarding school in Uganda until the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) arrives, kills their teachers, and captures the boys to become child soldiers. Forced to endure long treks through the jungle with little or no food, the boys are beaten and forced to kill, sometimes even other child soldiers. With the help of a young girl and the army's cook, though, they eventually manage to escape. McKay and LaFrance based this harrowing story on interviews with escaped child soldiers, and they have kept their focus on the young survivors as they desperately cling to their beliefs, hold out hope for rescue, and struggle with reintegrating into their communities, where people fear that the boys have been irrevocably changed into killers. LaFrance's panels are tinted with soft, rich colors, which belie the heartrending content within. This is a sorrowful and all-too-true story, but one that ends on a hopeful note. Grades 8-11. --Sarah Hunter

Review

McKay and LaFrance based this harrowing story on interviews with escaped child soldiers, and they have kept their focus on the young survivors as they desperately cling to their beliefs, hold out hope for rescue, and struggle with reintegrating into their communities, where people fear that the boys have been irrevocably changed into killers. LaFrance's panels are tinted with soft, rich colors, which belie the heartrending content within. This is a sorrowful and all-too-true story, but one that ends on a hopeful note. (Sarah Hunter *Booklist* 2013-04-15)

This is a must for the classroom! (Jeffrey Canton *Canadian Children's Book News*)

Winner of the 2009 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Juvenile Crime Novel, Sharon E. McKay's novel *War Brothers* is a gritty read, graphic in its story premise, in its details, in its reality. (*CanLit for Little Canadians* 2013-06-01)

This is a powerful graphic novel and a really good read. (J.K. Parkin *Comic Book Resources* 2013-02-11)

[LaFrance's] realistic drawings enhance the story presenting an unflinchingly dark visual representation of the horrors young boys like Jacob experience at the hands of the LRA. With this graphic-novel adaptation, the author and illustrator reinforce Jacob's conclusion that his role must be to tell the world what is happening to these children, hoping for an end to the violence. (Dean Schneider *Horn Book Magazine* 2013-06-27)

These components--strong story, powerful storyteller, talented artist--make for a winning combination. (*January Magazine* 2013-05-30)

Powerful storytelling based on documented experiences; despite being set in 2002, it's as relevant as ever.

(*Kirkus Reviews* 2013-02-15)

The youth of the world have the responsibility and the power to be engaged to alter the future of humanity. *War Brothers* is a means to convey the plight of child soldiers in Northern Uganda to young people through a lens that is accessible and attention grabbing. Young people should be outraged that their peers are being systematically abused by adults in wars that ultimately benefit no one. (*L. Gen the Honourable Romeo A. Dallaire (Ret'd), S*)

Normally, I prefer cleaner lines in graphic novels, but the sketchy, colored pencil type look worked really well for this story. It creates kind of a nightmare quality, reflecting the horror of being a child soldier. This is the kind of graphic novel everyone should read. (Martha Dodge *NetGalley* 2013-02-24)

War Brothers is a riveting and compelling account of a young boy from northern Uganda who is abducted into the Lord's Resistance Army. Sharon McKay and Daniel Lafrance have created a powerful graphic novel that provides a true no-holds-barred account of life as a child soldier. Readers are swept into the world of these child soldiers through intense action and dialogue where they experience their pain and losses, but also their triumphs and their courage. *War Brothers* presents this gripping tale in an engaging and attractive way for younger readers and fuels the elimination of the weapons system of recruiting children into war. (Melanie Tomsons, Executive Director and CCO *Never Again International: Canada* 2012-04-01)

As upsetting as this story is--all the more for its basis in the ongoing reality for children still conscripted into the LRA--McKay doesn't leave readers without a sense of hope. (*Publishers Weekly* 2013-04-29)

A challenging, uncompromising work... a beautiful treatment of stark ugliness... McKay's exhaustive research and extensive interviews with former child soldiers, and the verisimilitude she brings to her characterization and storytelling render the abstract concept of child soldiers with an all-too-real clarity. Lafrance's art adds another layer, transitioning from crisp naturalism to stylized shadows and colours as panic and violence rise in the characters... This is a powerful, important work of reality-based fiction... Parents [may] wonder whether their children should read it. The answer to this question is not only, Yes, they should, but also, Yes, they must. (Robert J. Wiersema *Quill and Quire* 2013-02-21)

This story is powerful, moving, and prompts much introspection about humans' inhumanity to others, boy soldiers, and how quickly an individual may be persuaded to kill another or betray others in order to save his/her own life. It also contains a powerful message about the redemptive power of hope and the resilience of individuals such as Jacob. The graphic novel format makes a compelling, heart-breaking story even more compelling. Understandably, readers will find it hard to forget this story, Jacob or his slow recovery from his ordeal. (Barbara A. Ward *Reading Today Online, International Reading Associ* 2013-06-12)

[Lafrance's] beautiful, colorful depictions of Africa [are] especially effective at offering the story urgency while still giving it the feeling of a boy's adventure comic--it's very reminiscent of European cartoonists like Hugo Pratt. Having this story geared to a younger audience makes the graphic novel so bold. It's depicting the horrors for the exact age group who experiences them out in the real world. It's done with such a delicate finesse that offers a path to empathy without causing a kid to sink into depression about the implications and possibilities. It puts a face on the nightmarish to just the people who can benefit from it. (John Seven *Reverse Direction* 2013-03-08)

It is powerful historical fiction. It is an important story to tell, and this team has done so admirably. (Sally Bender *Sal's Fiction Addiction* 2013-04-02)

A truly important work that is well worth the read. (Ryan P. Donovan *School Library Journal*)

Devastatingly realistic... What went on in this part of this world in the early 2000s is an important global issue for people of all ages to be aware of, and these boys prove to be a good entry point into a difficult subject. Although *War Brothers*, adapted from the author's prose novel, is fiction, it is based on interviews with survivors; everything that happened in this book has happened, and is happening still. With his first graphic novel, Lafrance's watercolor artwork truly shines, depicting many close-ups that convey the deep emotions that the characters are going through... A truly important work that is well worth the read. (Ryan P. Donovan, New York Public Library *School Library Journal* 2013-03-01)

This book is clean. Clean means it's tight. Maybe even deep... His story has haunted me for weeks. (Amy Cheney, Alameda County (CA) Library, *Write to School Library Journal YA Underground* 2013-03-19)

While capturing the horrific tragedy of the life of child soldiers, co-creators Sharon E. McKay and Daniel Lafrance also manage to offer inspiration: war decimates, and yet everlasting bonds can also be forged. [T]his is also a story of hope, courage, friendship, and family, Jacob reminds. He echoes his friend Hannah, ... that if the world knows that child soldiers suffer unimaginable cruelty and pain, then help will come. I hope this is right. With testimony as formidable as *War Brothers*, we can't say we didn't know. And now that we know, we must help, offer hope, and make change. That's a mantra for us all. (*Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center* 2013-03-11)

Highly recommended, this is a story that is riveting to read as long as you are brave enough to continue turning the pages. (Tasha Saecker *wakingbraincells.com* 2013-04-19)

Daniel Lafrance's striking artwork vividly brings the reader face to face with the children who are forced to participate in a brutal war they know little about... *War Brothers* is a truly important work both in the original version and in this graphic novel version. Highly recommended. (Chris Laurie, Outreach Librarian, Winnipeg Public *CM* 2013-09-06)

This story is based on actual events and is told in graphic novel format presenting a unique view of the situation in Uganda... The depiction of events is tastefully done so that students in younger grades are able to comprehend the severity of the events taking place in Africa. Although students would probably not pick this book up on their own and will need prompting, it is a great resource to have in any library collection. (Cassandra Rondinella *VOYA*)

This title would be a great addition to any Junior High or High School and could be used as a supplement for Social Studies or English classrooms... Highly recommended. (Jennifer Flaherty *Library Media Connection* 2013-10-04)

These components -- strong story, powerful storyteller, talented artist -- make for a winning combination. (*January Magazine Best of 2013 Children's Books* 2013-12-23)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Kline:

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Tiffany Serna:

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