

Book Review by Charlotte Lane 8M

on

“Out of the Ashes.”

“Out of the Ashes” is a book by Michael Morpurgo. It illustrates what happened when there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. It is a fiction book however, and is based on Morpurgo’s own experiences with the disease. He is writing in the voice of a young girl called Becky Morley. The book is her diary and you can experience what life was like for her in her position. It is also illustrated through her eyes.

This book is about Becky, a young girl, and her parents who own and live on a farm. When an outbreak of foot and mouth disease happens in a farm only three hundred miles away from their farm in Devon the family starts to feel uncomfortable, but there was little chance of the disease spreading that far.

When the disease spreads next door they are devastated and they pray that the disease won’t spread further. Becky realises the horrid truth. She had gone riding in next door’s field just two days before the outbreak! She had galloped through the fields with his sheep. The sheep would have been contaminated, as the signs of Foot and Mouth disease do not show until two weeks later. When she sees the fire smouldering next door she can not believe it may actually get to their farm and it would be her fault.

When her family find out about the disease on their farm she is sent away to her Auntie’s, as no one wants her to witness the animals being killed and burned. She runs back home, however, and decides she is going to keep her favourite lamb, Little Josh, and hide him so he will not be killed. Will her parents get suspicious at her behaviour? Will she give Little Josh away? Or will they stay together?

The main characters are Becky Morley and her mum and dad. Becky is a girl between the age of twelve and thirteen. She is a very happy and lively girl who loves to help her dad on the Farm. She cares a lot about others and tries to think of them before herself. She has to face a lot of family problems, worrying about whether she brought the Foot and Mouth Disease to their farm, and then, worst of all what to do with Little Josh after she has kidnapped him.

Becky’s dad cares a lot about working on the farm and takes great pride with his flocks and herds. He enjoys working but can get very confused and lost easily. The real problem he has to face is how he finds it quite hard to cope with the loss of his entire life’s work; all his animals were killed because of the disease.

Becky's mum is a gentle person; she can be very understanding and feels for her daughter and husband. Even though she does not have a big bond with the animals, she mourns their loss, not just for the animals but for her husband's and daughter's loss of happiness.

The main setting for the story is in a farm in Devon. There seems to be a nice friendly atmosphere around the farm house until the fires of the burning animal corpses start. The feeling of the farm then is just lonely.

Morpurgo is trying to make you think about how these people are feeling; how they respond to the loss of their animals. He is working your imagination without it being a true story; although it is fiction it is very real and could have happened to anyone.

My Personal Response

I really like this book; I think it is very powerful in the way that it has been written. I can not help but feel sympathetic towards the family, and now and then I can not help but think the characters are real, as is their story.

I think that the most interesting scene is the one in which Becky runs away from her Auntie's house. It leaves you worried for her but you can really feel her desperation to get home and help her father get through this. There were quite a few parts in this book which made me feel upset, including the part where Becky has to give away her lamb, Little Josh. You don't want Becky to lose it but she has to choose what is right. It is really heart-warming but sad, as she must give up something so close to her.

The book ended as I expected it to, but different at the same time. It may be the way that Morpurgo wrote it, as it is also not exactly how you pictured it would go. I had a rough idea what would happen, but Morpurgo really makes it unique by his techniques.

Lots of different types of people can enjoy this book. It is very interesting for those who enjoy history and sciences, because of how the disease affects animals and humans. It is good also for Morpurgo fans, as his books are really good; if you like one you are pretty much guaranteed to like them all. I would also recommend this to people between the ages of ten and sixteen, because the plot and happenings may be too complex for younger readers, and older readers may not like the style which Morpurgo has used to write the book in (as a diary).

I have learned quite a bit about different peoples' life problems. The book really tells you about how it must feel for people to lose animals upon which they depend for their lively hood. It really helps describe the conditions people can go through, including going crazy.

It is such a unique and original plot that I can not compare it to anything else I have read.