

Synopsis

There's a fine line between gossip and history, when one is talking about kings. Sophie Fitzosborne lives in a crumbling castle in the tiny island kingdom of Montmaray with her eccentric and impoverished royal family. When she receives a journal for her sixteenth birthday, Sophie decides to chronicle day-to-day life on the island. But this is 1936, and the news that trickles in from the mainland reveals a world on the brink of war. The politics of Europe seem far away from their remote island until two German officers land a boat on Montmaray. And then suddenly politics become very personal indeed. A Brief History of Montmaray is a heart-stopping tale of loyalty, love, and loss, and of fighting to hold on to home when the world is exploding all around you. Once in a while, a special book will cross our paths and make us grateful for life and the ability to read. I'm talking about A Brief History of Montmaray by Michelle Cooper. I'm calling her Australia's next stroke of literary brilliance. Viewpoint From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

On a small island in the Bay of Biscay, between France and Spain, lies the Kingdom of Montmaray, home of Sophia FitzOsborne, her tomboy sister Henry, and older cousin Veronica. They, along with Veronica's mad father the king and Sophia's brother Toby, are the last members of a

once-illustrious and colorful royal family dating back to the 11th century. But despite their titles and and wealth of familial history, the FitzOsbornes are nearly bankrupt, clinging to the crumbling family home with the aid of only a handful of loyal subjects. In many respects they are an isolated time capsule, a proud relic of happier and more plentiful times. In the fall of 1936 Sophia receives a journal for her sixteenth birthday and resolves to document her life -- the hopes, dreams, and everyday occurrences that make up her day to day life. She has no ambition of crafting an authoritative family history of the type Veronica works endlessly to compile -- but Sophia's scriblings are poised to become a critical record of a world on the brink of implosion. Montmaray may be small, but world events are destined to intrude on its shores, realigning Sophia's priorities and changing the course of her life forever. With the Spanish Civil War on one side and the heavy march of German Fascism on the other, Sophia is set to become the unlikely chronicler of a world on the cusp of war. Sophia is an utterly beguiling narrator, her chronicle of life in her crumbling family home full of wry humor and razor-sharp, disarmingly honest observations. The first half of her journal has an almost fairy tale-like quality to it -- the closest literary equivalent that comes to mind is E. Nesbit's *Five Children and It*.

A Brief History of Montmaray is a book that manages to be both simple and complex at the same time. It is the story of a girl living a mundane life in a poor, isolated island with her family and a few friends. But it is also a story filled with vibrant personalities, from Sophie's intellectual cousin Veronica to her tomboy little sister Henry. It is also the story of a pivotal time in history, at the eve of World War II where the Nazis are already starting to meet their mark. Many people who review this book compare it to *I Capture The Castle* by Dodie Smith. I hate to repeat a tired theme, but it really did remind me a lot of *I Capture The Castle*. The feel of the books is the same. Unfortunately, I liked *I Capture the Castle*, but did not love it. I feel very much the same about *A Brief History of Montmaray*. Let's start with what I loved. The characters. Without a doubt. Michelle Cooper created a group of quirky, charismatic characters who make you laugh more often than not. Sophie is a nice, fairly plain girl who is surrounded by extreme personalities. Henry has to prove to everyone she is all boy. Veronica has to constantly be intellectual. Rebecca has to be constantly unpleasant and worship mad King John. The list goes on. While the characters are eccentric, they are also well developed. By the end of the book, they are more than their quirks. I also loved the idea of the book. Montmaray is a fictional island off the coast of England that has its own monarchy (I didn't realize it was fictional at first and had to Wikipedia it to find out). Sophie is part of the royal family, but other than her bloodline, she is as poor as a churchmouse. The book is very atmospheric. You feel the

cold gloom of Montmaray, but also the beauty of the small, closeknit island.

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