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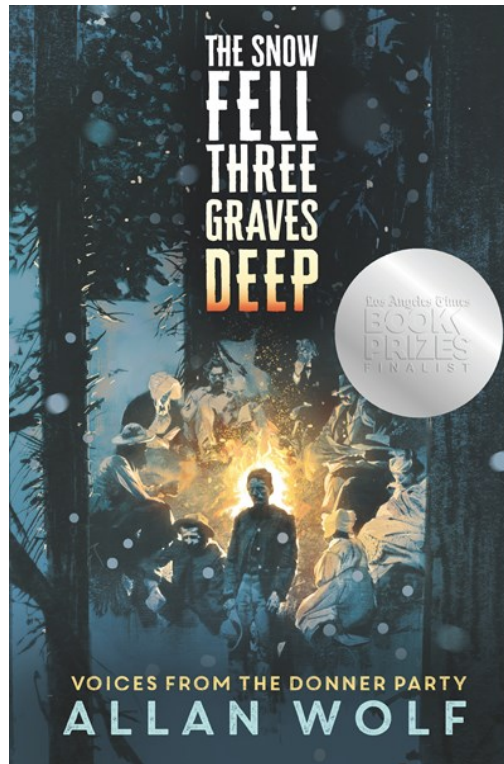
JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Review of *The Snow Fell Three Graves Deep*

Written by Allan Wolf

Educator Reviewer: Hope Stern, HS ELA

Student Reviewer: Cameron Stewart, 9th grade



Wolf, A. (2022). *The snow fell three graves deep: Voices from the Donner Party*. Candlewick Press.

978-1-5362-2819-9

Adult Review:

A retelling of the ill-fated journey of the Donner Party in the Sierra Nevadas during the winter of 1846-1847. Wolf uses historical accounts and various voices- including the voice of Hunger, in this narrative to tell the story of the party that diverted from the planned route to an undocumented shortcut west. The settlers faced tremendous hardships as travel proved more perilous and longer than expected. When winter sets in, the story takes an extraordinary turn into survival and the choices individuals make to remain alive. There is a substantial notes section at the back of the book filled with information about this party and its journey. This section can lead many to research this period of exploration and expeditions out west.

The only concerns that educators might need to consider is the difficult nature of hunger and death and the steps that some of the settlers had to make to survive, including cannibalism.

Student Review:

My name is Cameron Stewart, and the book I read was *The Snow Fell Three Graves Deep* by Allan Wolf. This book is about the Donner Party, a wagon train that attempted to travel to California during the years of 1846 and 1847. The train, famously, was snowed in near what is now Donner Lake and had to wait out the winter in log cabins they built. They did not have enough food to survive said winter, and had to resort to cannibalizing the corpses of fallen party members. 41 members of the party died by the time the last survivor (Ludwig Keseburg) arrived at Sutter's Fort on April 29th, 1847.

I enjoyed this book for many reasons. It's a very raw description of the events of the Donner Party, told in a very interesting way using countless, diverse perspectives to tell the story. The verse writing allows for more genuine emotion from its characters, which caused me to really enter the picture the book painted. The narrator of the story, a personification of Hunger, adds coherence to the book and I found myself waiting for the next Hunger section every time something interesting happened. The treatment of characters such as the Native Americans Luis and Salvador was also very genuine, and did not shy away from the truth of the prejudice they faced. However, my absolute favorite part of the book was the 42 page note section at the end. It was packed full of fascinating statistics, facts, and commentary. It had everything from a short biography of every major character and their connection to the story to commentary on America's "manifest destiny" during the time period in general.

One character I think really shows the author's respect towards the events is Ludwig Keseberg, a German immigrant who traveled with the Donner Party and, as I mentioned before, was the last survivor to reach Sutter's Fort. Many books, articles, etc about the Donner Party paint Keseberg as a bitter, foreign man turned into a flesh-crazed madman by circumstance. But Allan Wolf gives Keseberg a much more sympathetic treatment, as some other authors have done in the past. Though Wolf still includes the terrible extremes Keseberg was forced to (Keseberg survived alone for weeks, on solely the flesh of his passed companions), he still paints an unfortunate character who did what he had to do to survive. According to Wolf, most of these stories of Keseberg are likely fueled by xenophobia, which is a conclusion I am inclined to support.

In conclusion, *The Snow Fell Three Graves Deep* is a well written, and accurate account of the events the Donner party suffered through during their journey to California. Its treatment of the real people the book includes is genuine and honest, and its notes section has enough information to satiate even the most curious readers, because, after all, curiosity is just another form of Hunger.