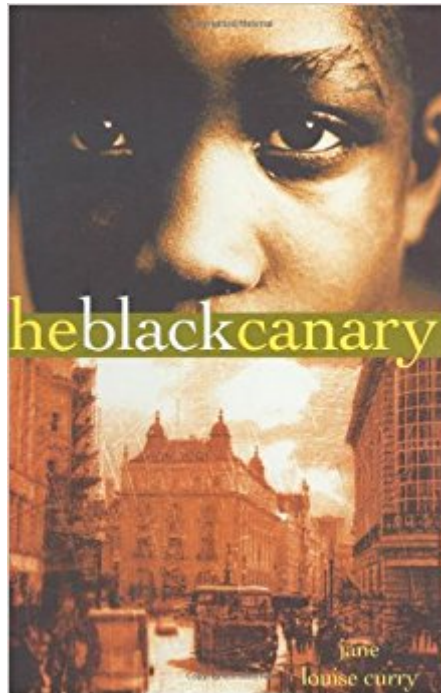




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The Black Canary



Synopsis

Twelve-year-old biracial James has grown up in a musical family. Not only are both of his parents musicians, but his four grandparents are as well. Everyone assumes that James will pursue music, yet he would rather become a newspaper reporter...or an astronomer...or a cook...anything that will let him leave music behind and be his own self. Everything changes when, on a family visit to London, James discovers a portal that leads to London in the year 1600, then finds himself unable to return to the point in time he had left behind. James is forced to join the Children of the Chapel Royal, a group that performs for the queen of England, and the musical talents he denied are now put to the test and pushed to their limits. In this alternate world James comes to realize that he cannot survive and get back to the twenty-first century without recognizing, understanding, and making the most of his musical gifts. Jane Louise Curry brings Elizabethan London to life in this remarkable story about music, family, and finding one's place in the world.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1020L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: Margaret K. McElderry Books; 1 edition (March 1, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0689864787

ISBN-13: 978-0689864780

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,521,232 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #85 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Renaissance](#) #708 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Renaissance](#) #3127 in [Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Performing Arts](#)

Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

Customer Reviews

Grade 5-9—James Parrett feels oppressed by his musician parents' focused lifestyle and constant performing. While visiting London, he discovers a strange shimmer in the air that takes him from contemporary London to the year 1600. In a series of return visits, he realizes that he is

trapped. As the time portals have shifted, and he cannot return to his true time. James is conscripted into the "Children of the Royal Chapel," who sing and perform for Queen Elizabeth. James, now nicknamed the "Black Canary," discovers his talent and love for music and performing. He realizes that he has grown and become "more ME" than his previous self, and he is forced to decide whether he will remain in his new life or return to his home and family. Curry's conclusion brings James's past and present together, and shows how he makes choices to change his life. James is a sensitive, thoughtful character, and readers will be drawn into his confusion and need to find himself. James's biracial identity brings an unusual dimension to his experiences. Supporting characters add conflict and interest to the story. Detail and historical characters, including Ben Jonson, bring Renaissance London to life, and readers will enjoy learning about 1600s clothing, food, intrigues, and music. While similar to Susan Cooper's *King of Shadows* (S & S, 1999) in plot, this story focuses on different aspects of past life and will find its own audience. Beth L. Meister, Yeshiva of Central Queens, Flushing, NY

Starred Review Gr. 5-8. Growing up in a close-knit, biracial American family with parents and grandparents professionally and personally engrossed in musical pursuits, 13-year-old James feels overprotected and pushed in the direction of their interests. He secretly resents the way his parents' careers absorb their time, and he resists developing his own musical talent. While staying in a London flat, James discovers a mysterious portal, steps through, and lands in Elizabethan times. Forced to fend for himself, he begins to explore his identity apart from his family's expectations, finding within himself an unexpected passion for singing. This is one of the few time-travel fantasies for children with a biracial character, let alone protagonist, and it includes James' acute observations of Elizabethan Londoners' reactions to him. Race, though, is only one of James' concerns as he struggles to survive where even the simple question "Where are you from?" leaves him scrambling to avoid pitfalls. James is a sympathetic character in both worlds, and readers will gladly follow him for the pleasure of his company as well as the need to know what will happen next. A genuinely good story that conveys a sense of darkness and mystery in the textured backdrop of a storied time and place. Carolyn Phelan Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I received the book quicker than I thought I would. The description said it was a library book, which it was, so I was surprised that the book was like new.

I'm a read-aloud Mom with a family of boys. What we loved about this book was its main character: a normal 13-year old boy who happens to be bi-racial and is just a regular American middle-class kid. Anonymous. He has no racial grievances to divulge, no surreptitious drug use or gang membership to disclose, no unhappy family life to struggle against. Nope, he's normal. James has to struggle against his HAPPY family life, just like your kids. All kids have to do this; to break out of the mold their parents choose and fit themselves into a world of their own choosing. This book does a VERY GOOD job with this tension: James feels the inexpressible dearness of his family when he begins to develop his own talents and independence, through necessity. And some action! My goodness, the abduction. How terrifying. We were all sure this book was going a different direction. I read this out loud to my family of boys, and it was a hit. It's so nice to read about a normal, non-messed-up minority kid. VERY RARE in children's fiction. We applaud.

Jane Curry's "The Black Canary," contrary to the view of the previous reviewer, is an engrossing read: my 13 year-old grandson went right through it (he quit "Harry Potter" V) and pronounced it "Good," which for him is the second-highest praise (first is reserved at the moment for the Artemis Fowl books). He especially liked the intriguing portal, through which James travels from contemporary London to the London of the Children of the Chapel Royal and the plots against Queen Elizabeth I, a portal which takes him to different points in both times, so that he has to arrange his final return to the present to precede the dramatic accident that placed him in the Thames in the winter of 1600. He also comes to feel responsible for helping one of his peers to save the boy's uncle from a coming purge of plotters against Queen Elizabeth, and figures out how to do this while still effecting his return "home." Curry is clearly interested in the world of the Elizabethan theater--Ben Jonson and other documented figures connected with the child actors and singers are characters--and the complicated politics of the time. Young readers may not be specifically interested in early music or English history, but they'll likely remember the ambience of this book when they do come to read about the Elizabethan age or go to a Shakespeare play or an early music concert. The main characters--James and his rival/mentor in the company, Jack--are compellingly drawn, and minor characters such as James's parents (one black, one white--hence James's sobriquet as "The Black Canary" when he is pressed to sing for Queen Elizabeth) and the singing teacher, not to mention Ben Jonson, are vivid and memorable. The details of contemporary London vs. London in 1600 give a lively contrast for readers thinking about how people lived then and now. I read quite a few young people's books because I vet them before sending them to my grandson (or he recommends books to me). We like books that are well written, with neat, surprising

plots and interesting characters (other books we've liked are "Holes" and "Hoot," as well as Eion Colfer's Fowl series). Maybe not everyone in the school to which the other reviewer gave the book will "get" it, but those curious about other times or experiencing difficulty finding a grownup self out of the tangle of insecurities and sometimes resentments of early adolescence will enjoy it and learn from it. Also, I thought it was well written without being at all precious.

Nowadays kids are bombarded by shallow games, movies, and books. Anything deeper than a comic book is challenging to them. I have kids who won't read a book because it is too thick. And then I have READERS. And many of them are very smart kids. They come from different family backgrounds. And so to have a black protagonist in a challenging time-travel book is a GIFT. But I wouldn't bother to review the book or give it more than 2 stars if it didn't have the lovely historical detail. I think a kid needs to like reading to get this book or be older. I doubt if a knitting group would cast off with the Black Canary, but they'd enjoy themselves if they did. Isn't knitting what all the 20 somethings are doing now? It's not the old ladies. They're all on the internet writing book reviews.

The children's book, *The Black Canary*, is a lackluster book that took me to snoozeville. Jane Louise Curry did a good job of writing about a kid that time travels to the 1600s; however, the book does not keep the interest of children. It seems that she is not writing for children, certainly not for young boys, but for a seniors' knitting club. She uses no action whatsoever. Every time I thought that something exciting was going to happen to the main character, James, it did not. The book also confused me. I had a very hard time trying to keep up with James' whereabouts. Each time I turned a page, he was politely walking somewhere new, not previously mentioned in the book. I do not consider myself an avid reader; therefore, when I pick up a book I want to be entertained. *The Black Canary*, though interesting, was laborious and not pleasurable. Nevertheless, I would highly recommend *The Black Canary* to a senior knitting club. I plead with parents not to buy this for their 12-year-old sons, unless they are looking for a form of cruel and unusual punishment.

Anyone who does not enjoy this lovely adventure of a young boy struggling to keep out of the grip of his musician family, or at least find his own music, has not sat at a window and daydreamed enough in his/her life! A compelling story with historical accuracy made palatable and fascinating, from dress of the period to what everyone ate at table, *The Black Canary* sings. A perfect book for the holidays for anyone, child or adult. Miss Curry's books take children's literature to another level, which, in this age of bite information, gives a child a bite he can chew.

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