

No Lookin' Back: A True-to-Life Western Story

Ted Riddle

Linda Riddle

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The rollicking historical novel No Lookin' Back captures the spirit of the Wild West via two brothers and their unquenchable sense of adventure.

Ted Riddle and Linda Riddle's historical novel *No Lookin' Back* recounts frontier adventures in the 1800s American West.

A dream-inspired, transcribed story embellished with details gleaned from research, library visits, and travels, the tale follows Thomas and John Summers, brothers who join the Union Army, fight in the Civil War, and then go out to explore the Wild West. They visit Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, and Colorado during their wide-ranging travels, which are an open-ended look at their historical period.

The story "ends and begins" with a gripping account of Thomas's death. This carries greater symbolic weight: the event represents a transition from an old, established way of life to the barreling progress of the modern world. Jumping back in time to his birth in Tennessee, the book then shares riveting, episodic tales that reinforce its theme of boundless horizons to explore. Thomas's trips through Oklahoma territory, Texas cattle drives, and the Rocky Mountains capture the expansive sweep of the West and evoke the sparse grandeur of its rugged landscapes. Later, a heartbreaking loss leads to a ride-off-into-the-sunset conclusion alluded to early on. It's a poignant, contented ending that also reflects some personal growth.

Embellished by supplementary materials (including a timeline of Western history, drawings, black-and-white photographs, and pencil illustrations that become more elaborate as the story goes on), this is an atmospheric tale. The book touches upon familiar historical reference points, too, including Wyatt Earp, Dodge City, and General Custer, weaving edifying factual information in. There are telling details about chuck wagons, hardtack, and bronco busting that animate its backdrop. Though its conversations are too exclamatory, its prose is otherwise straightforward and clear, complementing the shifting settings. When a train passenger falls and breaks his neck, for example, others open "the baggage-car door and [throw] the dead man in, right beside Tom's saddles and belongings." Grit and guilelessness dominate, as do memorable phrases (his "head felt as big as a number 3 washtub"). Grounded in the plainspoken dialect of its era, the prose evokes much with a few deft strokes: the "trains heading west were full of hopefuls chasing a dream" and the "sunsets were spectacular, showing the reds and golds in the whirls of clouds."

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JOSEPH S. PETE (March 17, 2023)

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