

The Magna Charta by James Daugherty

So, there I was at the homeschool curriculum convention, browsing through yet another booth. There it was again! The Magna Charta by James Daugherty! It had to have been the fourth or fifth booth with the book. I knew I was planning to study the years 500 to 1500 in our homeschool this year, but I wanted fun, historical fiction. This book sounded like it would be dull. Still, everybody seemed to have it, and it did fit the time period, so I bought it.

I reluctantly began to read it aloud to the children and was pleasantly surprised. "Hey, this is interesting and kind of funny!" I thought. No wonder James Daugherty won the Newberry (1940 for Daniel Boone); he can write!

The Magna Charta is historical fiction, but not in the more modern sense. Daugherty reports on the facts, but he engages the characters in conversations and tells you of their foibles. The book begins with an overview of 12th century England and moves right in to the lives of King Richard and King John and Robin Hood and Stephen Langton. The short chapters just beg to be read aloud. We enjoyed hearing Daugherty's descriptions of King John's royal rages where he would roll around on the floor and chew wood.

The book gives a history of what was going on in England before the Magna Charta was written and signed and why it was signed. The book ends with a section called "Children of the Magna Charta" which discusses American history in light of this historic document.

I highly recommend this book as a reader for anyone in fifth grade or above. It works well as a read aloud for perhaps third grade and up. Some of the information gets a little confusing-which battle? Who is this man again? Who's the bishop? This book was a nice bridge between a story of modern historical fiction (two kids interact with the historical character) and a textbook or straight telling of the facts.

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