



The Broken Blade

By William Durbin

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In 1800, 13-year-old Pierre La Page never imagined he'd be leaving Montreal to paddle 2,400 miles. It was something older men, like his father, did. But when Pierre's father has an accident, Pierre quits school to become a voyageur for the North West Company, so his family can survive the winter. It's hard for Pierre as the youngest in the brigade. From the treacherous waters and cruel teasing to his aching and bloodied hands, Pierre is miserable. Still he has no choice but to endure the trip to Grand Portage and back.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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The Broken Blade By William Durbin Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When his father is injured, 13-year-old Pierre takes his place as a voyageur on a 2400-mile, 12-week trip from Montreal to Lake Superior in 1800, paddling a canoe filled with trade goods. At first, Pierre counts every one of the difficult strokes, suffering raw hands, teasing, loneliness and backbreaking portages. But as the weeks pass, he grows into his work, even learning to accept the death of one of his comrades in the swirling rapids. Though this first novel lacks an overriding grand theme and is occasionally hindered by redundant dialogue, it is ripe with compelling information about the life of a French-Canadian voyageur on the Great Lakes; it will be especially fascinating to anyone who has ever walked the wild shores of Lakes Huron or Superior. The details are vivid: "The gunwales of each birch bark craft were painted with bright stripes, and 'North West Company' decorated each bow. Flags hung from the stern poles, and vermillion-tipped paddles stood propped in each craft." For young teens who have trouble even convincing their parents they're old enough to go alone to the mall, this adventure tale book will give rise to daydreams of a more rugged time. Ages 10-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8. Pierre, 13, is the son of a voyager, one of the French-Canadian canoemen who plied the fur trade in Canada during the last two centuries. When his father severely injures himself in a wood-chopping accident, Pierre signs on with his father's company in order to keep the family from poverty. The bulk of the novel is structured around the boy's first canoe trip to the wilderness outpost of Grand Portage. Along the way, he faces many challenges and has great adventures. He grows in physical strength and matures both mentally and spiritually. In short, he becomes a man. The combination of historical fiction set in 1800 with a coming-of-age tale works well here. Pierre's companions on his journey are a rowdy, disreputable lot, but they pull together when they must. There is the requisite bully whose respect Pierre must earn and a good-natured boss who has faith in him. The drowning of one of the boatmen sobers the crew and brings home to Pierre the very real dangers they face. The work is grueling and the food monotonous, but the men enjoy a rough camaraderie and savor the natural beauty that surrounds them. Middle school students will be attracted to this enjoyable, fast-moving story. *Bruce Anne Shook, Mendenhall Middle School, Greensboro, NC*

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From Booklist

Gr. 5^8. After Pierre's father injures his thumb chopping wood that Pierre should have chopped, the 13-year-old takes over one of his father's jobs: he signs on as a *voyageur*, a member of a crew transporting furs north from Montreal by canoe. His fellow voyageurs are a brawling, macho lot, and the work of getting along with them and proving himself a man is as difficult as the agonizing paddling and the portaging of heavy loads. Durbin seamlessly incorporates thorough historical research into the story, which is set in 1800, never bowing to modern-day notions of political correctness in his depiction of the characters' attitudes toward Indians. The lively writing, vivid characters, and page-turning adventure make this a great choice for Gary Paulsen fans. *Susan Dove Lempke*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Janice Martin:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite reserve and reading a publication. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the publication entitled The Broken Blade. Try to make book The Broken Blade as your friend. It means that it can be your friend when you really feel alone and beside those of course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortunate for you. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know every thing by the book. So, let's make new experience in addition to knowledge with this book.

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Mamie Donnelly:

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