



**Am I ready to read this book?
Read the reviews to decide.**

Reviews

Booklist starred (February 1, 2011 (Vol. 107, No. 11))

Grades 7-12. Sepetys' first novel offers a harrowing and horrifying account of the forcible relocation of countless Lithuanians in the wake of the Russian invasion of their country in 1939. In the case of 16-year-old Lina, her mother, and her younger brother, this means deportation to a forced-labor camp in Siberia, where conditions are all too painfully similar to those of Nazi concentration camps. Lina's great hope is that somehow her father, who has already been arrested by the Soviet secret police, might find and rescue them. A gifted artist, she begins secretly creating pictures that can—she hopes—be surreptitiously sent to him in his own prison camp. Whether or not this will be possible, it is her art that will be her salvation, helping her to retain her identity, her dignity, and her increasingly tenuous hold on hope for the future. Many others are not so fortunate. Sepetys, the daughter of a Lithuanian refugee, estimates that the Baltic States lost more than one-third of their populations during the Russian genocide. Though many continue to deny this happened, Sepetys' beautifully written and deeply felt novel proves the reality is otherwise. Hers is an important book that deserves the widest possible readership.

Kirkus Reviews starred (January 15, 2011)

This bitterly sad, fluidly written historical novel tackles a topic woefully underdiscussed in English-language children's fiction: Joseph Stalin's reign of terror. On June 14th, 1941, Soviet officers arrest 15-year-old Lina, her younger brother and her mother and deport them from Lithuania to Siberia. Their crammed-full boxcar is labeled, ludicrously, "Thieves and Prostitutes." They work at a frigid gulag for eight months—hungry, filthy and brutalized by Soviet officers—before being taken to the Siberian Arctic and left without shelter. Lina doesn't know the breadth of Stalin's mass deportations of Baltic citizens, but she hears scraps of discussion about politics and World War II. Cold, starvation, exhaustion and disease (scurvy, dysentery, typhus) claim countless victims. Lina sketches urgently, passing her drawings along to other deportees, hoping they'll reach Papa in a Soviet prison. Brief flashbacks, seamlessly interwoven, illuminate Lina's sweet old life in Kaunas like flashes of light, eventually helping to reveal why the repressive, deadly regime targeted this family. Sepetys' flowing prose gently carries readers through the crushing tragedy of this tale that needs telling. (maps, timeline, author's note) (Historical fiction. 12 & up)

Publishers Weekly (January 3, 2011)

Through the pained yet resilient narration of 15-year-old Lina, a gifted artist, this taut first novel tells the story of Lithuanians deported and sent to Siberian work camps by Stalin during WWII. From the start, Sepetys makes extensive use of foreshadowing to foster a palpable sense of danger, as soldiers wrench Lina's family from their home. The narrative skillfully conveys the deprivation and brutality of conditions, especially the cramped train ride, unrelenting hunger, fears about family members' safety, impossible choices, punishing weather, and constant threats facing Lina, her mother, and her younger brother. Flashbacks, triggered like blasts of memory by words and events, reveal Lina's life before and lay groundwork for the coming removal. Lina's romance with fellow captive Andrius builds slowly and believably, balancing some of the horror. A harrowing page-turner, made all the more so for its basis in historical fact, the novel illuminates the persecution suffered by Stalin's victims (20 million were killed), while presenting memorable characters who retain their will to survive even after more than a decade in exile. Ages 12-up.