

**Title: *Voices: The Final Hours of Joan Of Arc***  
**Author: David Elliott**  
**Genre: Historical Fiction**

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Bradley K. 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Date Reviewed: March 15, 2020**

The final hours of Joan of Arc, Born Jeannette D'Arc, is a topic of great intrigue among historians. In this book Elliot skillfully weaves together a series of curious poems and excerpts from primary source documents to produce a compelling story regarding the aforementioned mystery. The book follows a young girl in the early 1400's named Joan and her journey to seek out King Charles and restore him to his rightful throne as king of France. This takes place as the hundred years war ravages through mainland France, while Joan must listen to the voices in her head to lead her troops in a conquest to fight off the hordes of Englishmen who brought strife and turmoil to her home of France. The intrepid Joan is the one of few named characters in the book, and the others receive barely a hint of attention from the Author, among them are Joan's father Jacques, who just wishes she would live a normal life, the rightful ruler of France, King Charles, who turns on Joan as soon as his status is restored labeling her a "charlatan" and "impostor." A few key plot points are crucial to the overall understanding of the story, I specify this because much of the overall book is negligible, more on this later. One such plot point is Joan's initial departure from the village, she is expected to behave like the other women, follow her mother's footsteps, and be ordinary, but as you'll learn, Joan is quite extraordinary. This clearly establishes Joan as an outcast, a theme which the book will later play on to an almost comical degree. The next critical event occurs when Joan is visited by numerous saints including St. Catherine and St. Margaret, she claims that through these divine visitations she gained her immense skill in battle and her motive for a righteous journey. The third significant event is her encounter with Charles VII where she finds the true meaning of restoring him to the throne and begins her conquest to free France from the grasp of Great Britain. Lastly, the climax of the story, without saying too much, Joan's tactical and leadership abilities shine in full force, as she drives the English out of her home, she discovers a new purpose in life, but it was cut short by her condemnation by English sympathizers in the French Court system who infamously burned her at the stake and revoked any credit she was allotted from her military successes. Later Joan was made a saint and commended rather than condemned by the Frenchmen who had come to realize that she was, in fact, a hero but the trial of nullification occurred too late, 24 years too late.

*Did the plot interest you?*

Most of this book is immensely interesting, and overall it is a fantastic story of what might have possibly happened to Joan in the months leading up to her execution.

*Was the pace too fast, too slow, or just right?*

my main gripe is with the pacing of book, specifically, the use of wholly unnecessary poems throughout the story, for example, the book includes an excerpt from a primary source where Joan briefly mentions her sewing ability, the book proceeds to give a long, over the top, rambling poem about her sewing skills, this does not occur just this once, including when describing an

injury Joan may have suffered the author writes a poem from the perspective of the crossbow and writes a visceral description of the injury that was unnecessarily disturbing and unsettling but rather throughout the story, The pace of the story is bogged down by this poor decision and it greatly detracts from the overall enjoyment of reading this book.

*What grade levels is the book appropriate for?*

Another major issue I take up with the book is its covering of topics that just don't make sense, and are inappropriate for the target audience, that being young adults, perhaps grades 7-12. If these topics were supported by the primary source documents, their inclusion would be acceptable, however for some reason or another the author feels it necessary to exaggerate and objectify certain aspects of the main character, and it as well detracts from the enjoyment of reading the book.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

As far as the target audience is concerned, they may well lack basic knowledge surrounding the Hundred Years War and the politics of Europe at that time, I know I certainly did. Before the reader picks this book up they should do a quick overview of the war, and of the life of Joan of Arc, because I feel that the book does gloss over some very important points.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

The ideal reader for this book would be any young adult who enjoys history and historical fiction novels, but is also skilled in reading comprehension and well-versed in interpreting symbolism and larger themes.

#### **Final Verdict: 4 Stars**

The book was excellent at its best, and was plodding and strange at its worst, the inclusion of poems, especially those from Joan's perspective, as well as primary source documents made for a much more interesting read compared to that of a linear story. A must read for anyone who enjoys European history, world history, dramatic epics, or just a compelling story about someone who stood up for what they thought was right.

**Reviewer's Name and Grade: Kaitlyn H., 8<sup>th</sup> Grader**

**Date Reviewed: December 16, 2020**

The book **Voices** details the life of Joan of Arc in metered verse. It utilizes many modern forms of poetry, as well as those of Joan's era. It tells her story from the points of view of many inanimate objects that are an important part of her journey. Fragments from the Trial of Condemnation and the Trial of Nullification are included, putting a non-fiction twist on the book. There are also poems spoken by members of Joan's family, and Saints Michael, Catherine, and Margaret. Readers should be aware, that there are many French place names, that may be hard to pronounce. Luckily, there is a pronunciation guide in the beginning of the book, as well as a map, so you can track Joan's journey through each poem. As is fitting for Joan's story, fire is a frequent motif in the book. There are several chapters featuring the haunting voice of the fire itself, as it waits for the end of Joan's story. However, nothing compares to hearing it straight

from the source. Every other chapter is told from Joan's own point of view. But she is shown in her true light when the story is told in another point of view. What is so unusual about this story is how each object and person is portrayed as having their own lives and storylines. The chapters told by her family and the British aristocracy show her in the typical 13th century lens of a dysfunctional, reckless, unpolished woman. But the chapters told by the objects she held, they display her as a ruthless warrior, fearless leader, and hero who was ahead of her time. We see her in that last light, with no small thanks to authors like David Elliot, who manage to capture the true nature of Joan of Arc and her **Voices**.

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

Yes. While Joan's story in itself is interesting, the structure of the story adds a unique spin to a well-known story.

*Was the pace of the story too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The book was perfectly paced. While it may come off as too fast at first, there is a fine line between too slow and too fast in verse, this book is on the line with a scary preciseness.

*What grade levels is this book appropriate for?*

I would say that this book could be read by teenagers of all different ages. But I think that this book is best suited to grades 7 through 9.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

Someone who reads often, and can read something in one sitting. Putting this book down for too long loses the flow of the story. But there is something new to be discovered every time you read the book.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teen to know about this book?*

I think it is important to know the context of this story, and also having a good idea of Joan of Arc's story before reading is helpful.

*5 Stars*

While poetry isn't usually my type of literature, I found that this book had the plot and substance to keep me interested. The structure also keeps you on your toes, and the unusual perspectives make you see everything differently. The one thing that I felt could be done better were the chapters from Joan's perspective. They were very formal, and lacked personal insight.