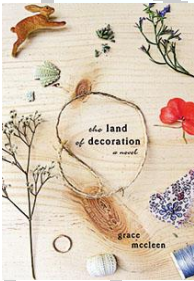




**Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons  
Teacher's Book Review**



***The Land of Decoration*, Grace McCleen  
Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013.**

I have always been fascinated by the subject of religious faith. How is faith formed and what sustains it? The ten year old protagonist of today's novel, Judith McPherson, tells the readers that "Faith is like imagination. It sees something where there is nothing, it takes a leap, and suddenly you are flying." Judith's mother died shortly after her birth and she has been raised by her fundamentalist father, whose grief has prevented him from developing a paternal bond with his daughter, at least the paternal bond she so deeply craves. Judith's sense of isolation is further experienced at school, where her religious beliefs and her "beyond her age" understanding of the world, alienates her from her peers. Her escape from loneliness at home and bullying at school is engineered through the creation of a miniature world in her bedroom – a small town duplicating her real world through little people, houses, the school she attends and the factory where her father works. She becomes the creator of the world she would like to inhabit, instead of the one in which she is forced to survive.

Judith's world begins to unravel when she notices that events in the Promised Land – The Land of Decoration made of scraps of fabric and paper and found items – parallel the events of her real world. Cotton balls and blobs of shaving cream scattered throughout her pretend world appear the next day as an early October snow storm, blanketing her town and resulting in the closure of school and postponing her dreaded encounter with her nemesis, a bully named Neil Lewis. Further incidents occur – the return of a pet cat and the arrival of a sympathetic substitute teacher – all staged first in her make believe world. Judith begins to talk to God and God answers her, enlisting her help as his agent on earth. At first she feels emboldened by her newfound powers, that is, until she discovers that they can be used to harm others and the voice she hears might not be God after all.

I loved this book for many reasons. Judith is a character the reader will cheer for and believe in and the journey alongside this remarkable little girl will offer many answers to some of the big

questions people ask in their lives. Why does God allow suffering? What is faith? What is the nature of miracles? Yet the author still leaves room for wonder and speculation. Is this a child who truly hears the voice of God or does she suffer from schizophrenia? Is Judith able to control events in the future or are these occurrences mere coincidence? The plot is intriguing and the reader is tempted to flip the pages quickly to discover the outcome of it all but the sheer beauty of the prose will hold the reader back, to savour each page. It's the kind of book that makes the reader want to jot down quotations. It is a book that you will not forget because of the originality of its premise and the profundity of its theme.

