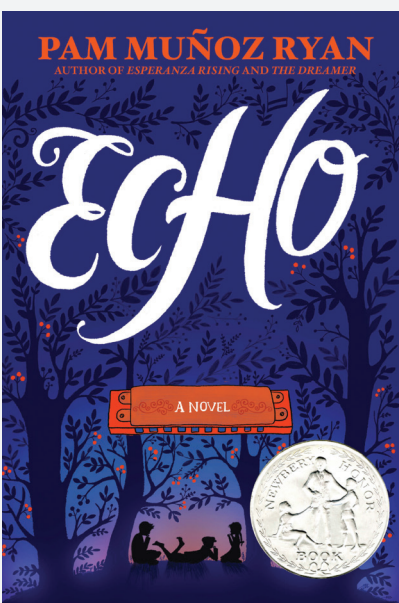


First Opinion: Magic, History, and Music: The Power of Three in *Echo*

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Echo*. Scholastic, 2015.

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Magic and the number three thread through the novel *Echo* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Even the title plays on the idea of three—though it is one word, it resonates in three ways across the novel. The magic of the three-part prophecy echoes through the stories of the main characters, and as readers we see the repetition of the prophecy as it repeats in each story. A prophecy, a promise, a harmonica—these three magical components weave the storylines of the three characters together. The stories, immersed in history and music, provide us a new way to see the world; they are part of our own past. The events referenced in the characters' lives have created moments and shadows on our current lives. When we as readers are touched by the events, we hear those moments clearly, even though they have long passed. The importance and value of music as art, solace, and communication link the three stories, as does the very special harmonica. The novel begins by establishing a magical world for us, and we meet the three abandoned daughters of the king, the witch who curses them, and the boy who becomes their messenger. As the prophecy says: “Your fate is not yet sealed. / Even in the darkest night, a star will shine, / A bell will chime, a path will be revealed” (24).

Again, we see the number three in a star, a bell, and a path. These symbolize hope, which is, of course, another type of magic. The moments of darkness that are part of our history, which

echo through the personal stories of the characters, also provide the very human magic that comes with hope and belief. A character named Otto becomes the messenger and passes a magical harmonica out into the world.

Echo is a story about destiny, music, and hope. The harmonica, as a symbol of magic and hope, appears in each of the three storylines. Friedrich's story opens with the lyrics of "Brahm's Lullaby," Mike's story opens with the lyrics of "America the Beautiful," and Ivy's story opens with the lyrics of "Auld Lang Syne." Each song is played on the harmonica, and as the characters play their stories, their hopes, fears, and love of music are added to the harmonica.

Friedrich is consumed by his love of music—he hears it in his head, conducts imaginary symphonies, and is the "youngest and smallest apprentice in the biggest harmonica factory in the world" (48). Unfortunately, 1933 Germany is not the place to be different, and while Friedrich's family shares his love of music and his imagination, the teachers and students at his school do not. One of the workers in the factory tells Friedrich, "You know, the new Germany doesn't like favorites. We should all be of one mind and focus, for the fatherland, for Hitler's family, so that we can be led out of darkness" (61). Hitler's politics infiltrate the country, the town, and Friedrich's family. Elizabeth, his sister, argues that only some music is acceptable now. Friedrich's father explains, "Music does not have a race or a disposition. . . . Every instrument has a voice that contributes. Music is a universal language. A universal religion of sorts" (86). Friedrich, like his father, sees music as something without boundaries, something that threads through the story of the world. When he leaves his home to bribe the guards at Dachau to release his father, he hides the harmonica that has brought him such joy.

Mike and Frankie live with their grandmother, a piano teacher. While the boys and their grandmother do not have much money, they share a deep love of music. Granny taught music to people whether or not they could afford it, explaining that "just because someone was poor didn't mean they were poor of heart" (221). She tells Mike and Frankie stories about New York, concert halls, and sandwiches. Both boys dream of going to New York; this dream and their grandmother's stories give them hope in the orphanage. Mike finds the harmonica and revels in the sounds it makes. A series of misunderstandings leads him to try to run away to New York.

Ivy and her family live in California and are friends with many Japanese families who are taken away to internment camps. Ivy, like Friedrich and Mike, finds the harmonica and uses it to play music. As one of her close friends, who is a young Japanese-American soldier, leaves to go back to the frontlines, she gives it to him so that he can take music with him. The harmonica saves his life and protects him from a bullet.

These three stories come together in New York at, of course, Carnegie Hall. Friedrich, Mike, and Ivy and their shared love of music bring the novel to its conclusion. Music provided the magic of hope in their lives, providing them a light in the darkness and a path for them to follow. The use of three in the novel helps create the feeling of magic—three stories, three songs, three paths to the same concert stage, where their music could come together.

About the Author

Melanie Hundley, a 2007 graduate of the University of Georgia, is an associate professor at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She teaches young adult literature and writing methods courses. She is passionate about young adult literature and getting books into the hands of kids. She coordinates Patterson RAPS (Read and Play Saturdays), a reading program for middle school students.