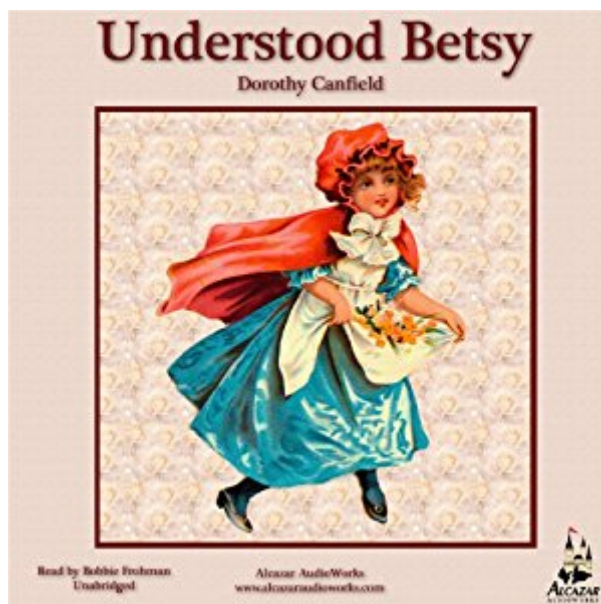


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# Understood Betsy



## Synopsis

Elizabeth Ann was orphaned at an early age and raised by her maiden aunts in the busy city. Sudden illness forces the aunts to send Betsy to other relatives, The Putnams, who live in the country on a farm. Betsy learns all about the farm and making butter and applesauce and dearly loves her new life. When one of the aunts comes back and wants to take Betsy back to the city. . . such a dilemma! Children can readily relate to Betsy who is a real girl in a real world where fortune seems to direct her life. She so loves being on the farm and doing all the things a farm girl does, including going to school. When fate again intervenes and tries to take her away from the life she loves, some manner of common sense hitcomes into play and Betsy, though torn, bounds into another day of farmlife, full of caring love for all she comes in contact with, and grows into a beautiful young lady. Table of Contents: Chapter 01. Aunt Harriet Has a Cough Chapter 02. Betsy Holds the Reins Chapter 03. A Short Morning Chapter 04. Betsy Goes to School Chapter 05. What Grade is Betsy? Chapter 06. If You Don't Like Conversation in a Book Skip this Chapter! Chapter 07. Elizabeth Ann Fails in an Examination Chapter 08. Betsy Starts a Sewing Society Chapter 09. The New Clothes Fail Chapter 10. Betsy Has a Birthday Chapter 11. "Understood Aunt Frances"

Dorothy Canfield Dorothea Frances Canfield (1879-1958) was an American author and both an child and adult educational activist. Canfield worked closely with Maria Monterssori in Italy, and was greatly influential in promoting education in the United States. Dorothy Canfield was born in Kansas, but her family traveled as her father's academic career progressed, he eventually became president of Ohio State University. Canfield settled in Vermont with her husband and children, and continued writing professionally.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read it over and over. Reading it as an adult I still enjoyed it, but I gained some insight as to why. This novel is about a young girl who feels that the world is a dangerous place and who goes around feeling vulnerable and apprehensive. The relatives who have cared for her have taught her to be frightened, self-doubting, and lacking in self-confidence. Betsy is saved by an illness in one of her aunts that requires her to go live elsewhere. The only option is to live with some other relatives who live in Vermont (in the country), and her aunts think this is not a good place for her to go but there is no choice. The Vermont relatives treat her like a normal and capable young girl who is expected to pull her share of the load. From them, and through her experiences living in the country, Betsy discovers she is competent and that the world is not so dangerous. She experiences love that is not suffocating. She builds self-confidence and self-esteem and becomes a responsible, happy little girl who knows that whatever difficulties present themselves, she will be able to deal with them. I also loved the family she went to live with and wished I could live on a farm in Vermont, too, and make maple sugar in the snow! This is a particularly wonderful book for girls because it is about discovering one's own competence and abilities. I would put it in the same category as "Brave Irene" by Steig, only this book is for the 8-12 year old range, I think.

In the beginning, as Peggy Parrish puts it, Elizabeth Ann was a wimp. She was sent to her cousins, the Putneys, in the middle of her story. They began to teach her how to think for herself. By the end of the story she could think about anything she wanted to without explaining it to anyone. This is a very well written story. It's a wonderful book relating to life at the turn of the century. It shows how schools, homes and lifestyles have changed over the years. This is one of the top ten books on my personal list. I received this book as a Christmas present in 1997 when I was eight years old. I thought it was an excellent story because Betsy really improved in her new one-room school. Her teacher is really nice because she let Betsy read with the seventh graders, do second grade math and third grade spelling! This story really makes you feel like you are Betsy's friend Ellen. I also like how she and the other girls in her one-room school joined together to make new clothes for the boy whose stepfather is an alcoholic. All the people are really caring in this book.

The last word of Understood Betsy is "Happiness" - and yet here I am, crying. A bit like the Little House books, Understood Betsy gives nitty gritty, realistic details of what daily life was like for a

little girl living on a small farm in Vermont in 1906. Betsy herself is just as fascinated to hear about what life was like before she was born, when lead pencils were cast in a groove on a desk in the schoolhouse, as I was to read the descriptions of Betsy learning to manually mold and churn butter. Yet all this history is purely incidental to Betsy's story. One year with her no-nonsense country relatives transform Betsy from a fearful, sheltered nine-year old into a confident and responsible ten-year old. The gentle irony of the narrator's voice allows us to identify with Betsy's insecurity and self-pity, while realizing that her apprehensions are merely silly notions planted in her head by overprotective aunts. Though Betsy may at times feel abandoned and bewildered, she is surrounded by love, and has the common sense to snap out of her brooding whenever something interesting happens. I cried so much that watching me, you would have thought the book to be quite tragic; but the tears were tears of pride and happiness for Betsy. What a great book :-)

I read this book countless times when I was younger, constantly checking it out from the library. I rediscovered it recently after finding it again at my college. I reread it and found it just as good as I had remembered; not only this, I read it to my roommate, who also loved it. This is the general reaction from those I've met who read it -- they loved it. Many others have already given info about the story, so I'll try not to repeat that. I think my favorite part is the way that the author addresses the reader, managing to communicate her own opinions while not distracting you from the story. This particularly makes it possible not to take Betsy and her neuroses too seriously during the beginning when she's still afraid of her own shadow. I also appreciate the author's sympathetic view of Betsy. She could easily have described her as a difficult, obnoxious brat (which is probably the way many of her aunts' friends in the city thought of her), but instead she shows us Betsy's strength and true character that comes out gradually as she is challenged rather than coddled. It is a definite success of the author that you grow fond of her rather than wanting to throw your arms up in the air in disgust (at the beginning of the story, anyway; by the end Betsy is very strong, capable, and worthy of our respect). The setting is also very well-done. As many others have mentioned, it gives you a strong feel for the time period and for what life was like back then. This book provided me with one of the strongest mental pictures of what life in our country was like a century ago, and this picture was vivid enough to remain with me for years. Well-done plot, likeable and realistic characters, a strong setting, the ability to make its readers remember it for years -- this book has the necessary ingredients for a true classic.

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