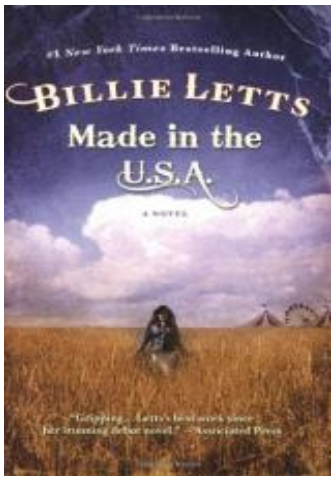
Made in the U.S.A.

by Billie Letts



About the Book

The bestselling author of **Where The Heart Is** returns with a heartrending tale of two children in search of a place to call home.

Lutie McFee's history has taught her to avoid attachments... to people, to places, and to almost everything. With her mother long dead and her father long gone to find his fortune in Las Vegas, 15-year-old Lutie lives in the god-forsaken town of Spearfish, South Dakota with her twelve-year-old brother, Fate, and Floy Satterfield, the 300-pound ex-girlfriend of her father. While Lutie shoplifts for kicks, Fate spends most of his time reading, watching weird TV shows and worrying about global warming and the endangerment of pandas. As if their life is not dismal enough, one day, while shopping in their local Wal-Mart, Floy keels over and the two motherless kids are suddenly faced with the choice of becoming wards of the state or hightailing it out of town in Floy's old Pontiac. Choosing the latter, they head off to Las Vegas in search of a father who has no known address, no phone number and, clearly, no interest in the kids he left behind.

Made in the U.S.A. is the alternately heartbreaking and life-affirming story of two gutsy children who must discover how cruel, unfair and frightening the world is before they come to a place they can finally call home.

Discussion Guide

1. This novel revolves around a brother and a sister who have both experienced hard times, but react to their plight quite differently. How would you describe their relationship to each other and their contrasting reactions to hardship?

2. Fate, as a younger sibling, seems to need Lutie more than she needs him. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. Early in the novel, Lutie makes the choice to flee Spearfish rather than risk being put in foster care. Toward the

middle of the novel, Fate says to Lutie: ?Well, maybe we should have stayed in Spearfish after Floy died. Sure, we would?ve gone on to foster care, but maybe we would?ve been lucky. Both of us might?ve gone with a nice family.? What do you think of Lutie?s decision? Do you think Lutie and Fate might have been better off if they?d been put in foster care?

4. Lutie often acts recklessly and impulsively. Why do you think she often puts herself and Fate in such dangerous situations? such as when she and Fate pick up Michael, the hitchhiker?

5. Much of this book is set in Las Vegas, a place known for its glitz and glamour and its promise of wealth, fame, and happiness. The Las Vegas described in the book, however, is a very different sort of place. Why do you think Billie Letts chose to set most of this book in Las Vegas?

6. How does Lutie change after the incident with her boss at the Desert Palms Motel?

7. Do you like Lutie? Do you empathize with her?

8. Juan Vargas helps Fate and Lutie out many times while they are in Las Vegas, but he does not reveal himself to them until later in the novel. Why doesn?t Juan identify himself to the children initially? He is a loner, so why is he drawn to these children?

9. Mama Sim is incredibly kind to Lutie and Fate. Why do you think she welcomes the children into her home so easily and why is she so tolerant of Lutie?s behavior?

10. Why is Juan Vargas insistent on returning to Las Vegas before his father comes home? Do you understand his reluctance to come back home?

11. How does Fate grow throughout the novel, and in particular, how does he change after he meets Johnny?

12. Why is Lutie so intent on leaving Mama Sim?s house, even after Fate asks her to stay? Why is it so hard for Lutie to accept love and help?

13. How are Lutie and Juan alike? In what ways do they learn from each other throughout the course of the book?

14. How is the word ?family? defined in this novel? Juan describes his family as a ?tribe.? Is there a difference between tribe and family?

15. Made in the U.S.A. is the story of two children?s journey to find a home. Do you think they?ve found one at the end of the novel?

16. Discuss the very last scene of the novel. Do Lutie and Fate seem changed from the beginning of the novel? Do you like the way Letts chose to end the novel or would you have ended it differently?

Author Bio

Billie Letts is the author of numerous short stories. Her first novel won the Walker Percy Award and the 1996 Oklahoma Book Award. She lives in Oklahoma with her husband, Dennis.

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