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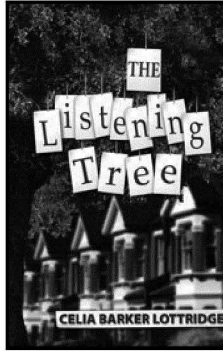
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LOTTRIDGE, Celia Barker  
*The Listening Tree*  
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2011. 168p.  
Gr. 5-8. 978-1-55455-052-4. Pbk.  
\$11.95

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This novel follows Ellen and her mother as they are forced to abandon their drought-stricken Saskatchewan farm to board with Aunt Gladys in Toronto. The bustling city is overwhelming to Ellen, and she retreats to the large leafy tree outside her window where she can watch and listen to the neighbour children playing below. She is hesitant about joining them in their games, but when she overhears a plan to evict them, she realizes she must overcome her fears to help. Ellen is resourceful and industrious, and she helps Charlene and Joey develop a plan to contact their landlord and inform her about the plot to swindle her out of her money. Ellen also assists them in earning enough to pay the overdue rent.

The impact of the Depression overshadows the entire narrative. The question of Ellen's father, who left the farm to find work out west, remains uncertain. His infrequent letters provide a counterpoint to the relatively stable domesticity of the boarding house, although the Depression is felt even there. Everyone staying at the boarding house helps out, and Aunt Gladys' basement rooms are a testament to the luxuries that used to be so commonplace. This novel evokes the Depression-era history of Canada and the resilience required by both adults and children to survive.

**Thematic Links:** Great Depression; Toronto; Friendship; Community

*Kristine Moruzi*