

Book Review: *City of Gold* by Will Hobbs

*Telluride Magazine* Winter/Spring 2020-2021, page 88

Confession: I made it to the end of this book without realizing it was meant for young readers (ages 10 and up). Sure, it was written from the perspective of 15-year-old Owen, but the historical context—Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, the Robbers Roost outlaw hideout, the tuberculosis epidemic, the Smugglers-Union mine strike, the days of mule rustling and traveling by horseback or train—was all so intriguing that it was hard, even for an adult, to put the book down.

The same qualities that help children relate to these characters are just as endearing to adult readers; Hobbs' use of dialogue and description are masterful. The two boys, Owen and his younger, mischievous brother Till, are charming as they track down the thief that stole their family's prize mules, without which their widowed mother will not be able to make a living on their land in Durango.

Owen makes a solo journey into the high country and over the treacherous mountain passes to Telluride, where one of the mules has been forced to labor for the mines, and joined by Till, they hunt the rustler all the way to canyon country. The landscape jumps off the pages thanks to Hobbs' obvious familiarity with the terrain from backpacking and exploring; he is deftly able to reimagine these settings as they would have looked and felt more than a century ago. Even the raucous mining town of Telluride is brought into sharp relief, contrasting the upscale ski resort it has become since.

This is a great piece of historical Western fiction for readers of any age, but it is certainly appropriate for young people curious about what life was like around these parts long ago.