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Surviving the Applewhites

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Tolan, Stephanie S. *Surviving the Applewhites*. HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 0066236037. \$17.89. 216 pp.

Reviewer: Peggy Robertson

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Humorous fiction;

Subject: Theater -- Juvenile fiction; Juvenile delinquency -- Juvenile fiction; Home schooling -- Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Welcome to Wit's End, home to the Applewhite family. Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and children live in a hodge-podge of homes and cottages and attend Creative Academy, their version of a home-school. All family members seem to thrive on the eccentricity and creative nature of Wit's Ends except E.D. who would vastly prefer the structure of a traditional school.

Then Jake Semple joins the mix. Classed as trouble-maker, Jake has been kicked out of every school he's attended and comes to Wit's End as a last resort before Juvenile Hall. Because they are roughly the same age and because E.D. has an organized course of study, E.D. is unwillingly assigned the task of helping Jake understand the Creative Academy curriculum. At Creative Academy each student decides individually what to study and how to study. Mostly, the children are left to their own devices so the adults can pursue their own creative projects. Suddenly the family is forced to work together when E.D.'s father Randolph agrees to direct a community theatrical production.

This award-winning book is a delightful peek into a very eccentric family. Jake Semple has spent the last several years trying hard to be different. He is thrust into a family where every member is not only different but prized for their creativity. Each character is made to feel valuable and important individually but when brought together for a common project, they see how their individual talents buoy up the entire family. The lesson for Jake (and all of us) is that being different is not as important as being needed, that finding a passion allows not only personal growth but also a means of helping others.