



2009

# Perfect Chemistry

Megan Harris

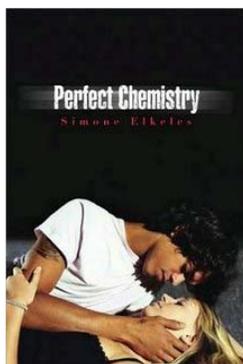
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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Harris, Megan (2009) "Perfect Chemistry," *Children's Book and Media Review*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 1 , Article 30.  
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Elkeles, Simone. *Perfect Chemistry*. Walker, 2009. ISBN 9780802798220. \$9.99. 369 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Social classes--Juvenile fiction; Dating (Social customs)--Juvenile fiction; Gangs--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

When Brittany and Alex are forced to sit together in chemistry class, they have no idea how upside-down they will make each other's worlds. Brittany attempts to maintain her flawless image as head cheerleader. Alex has a roughened gangster image, which he uses to protect his family after his father is killed. Both teenagers hate each other at first. So much so that Alex takes a bet offering him a new car if he can get Brittany to sleep with him. As he gets to know Brittany throughout the year, his feelings soften. Brittany also finds in Alex a sincere confidant and a loyal friend. While trying to visit Brittany, Alex is arrested. His release puts him in debt to the leader of his gang, who forces him to deal drugs. Ashamed, Alex breaks up with Brittany. In an effort to gain him back, Brittany sleeps with him. After sleeping with Brittany, Alex goes to finish the drug deal and finds his friend Paco shot dead by his gang leader, who then shoots Alex. This experience leads Alex to leave his gang, a process which requires violent beating and branding. Later, Alex and Brittany attend the same University, marry, and become successful chemists.

Elkeles' take on the challenges of two high school teenagers alternates back-and-forth between the perspectives of Alex and Brittany. While it is fast-paced and includes positive messages of tolerance and perseverance, *Chemistry* also includes large amounts of profanity and sexual content. Images of unprotected teen sex, violence, and the favorable portrayal of sex as a way of securing affection make this book a questionable choice for younger readers.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)