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The Honest Truth

Leah Christopher

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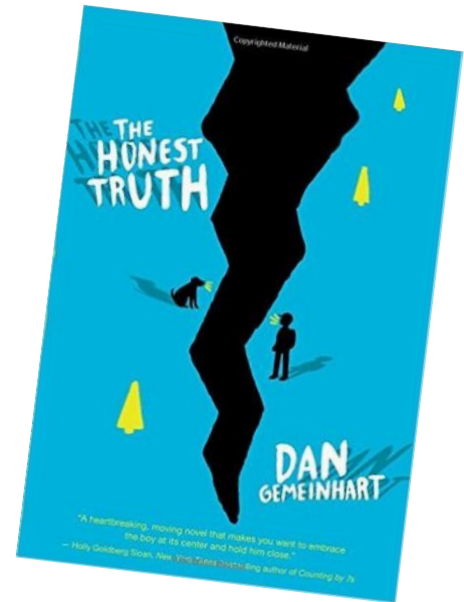
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Book Review

Title: The Honest Truth
Author: Dan Gemeinhart
Reviewer: Leah Christopher
Publisher: Scholastic Press
Publication Year: 2015
ISBN: 9780545665735
Number of Pages: 229
Interest Level: Intermediate
Rating: Excellent



Review

Is it better to face death by accepting it or running away? When twelve-year-old Mark receives the news that his cancer is back—again—he disappears, trying to find meaning in his life by following his dream to scale Mt. Rainier. Shaking the police off his trail and fending off bullies, Mark manages to arrive at the mountain in a terrible blizzard. With his sidekick dog, Beau, Mark begins the icy ascent. As he climbs—getting heavier, colder, and sicker with each step—he realizes what gives his life meaning: his family and friends. They have struggled to understand how he has felt all these years, but they’ve done their best—and his running away has probably devastated them. Even as his heart changes, Mark collapses from exhaustion. Beau finds help from the rescue team, and Mark ends up in the hospital, with readers left to consider whether he’ll survive.

Although Mark’s far-fetched journey seems to place it in a category far from realistic fiction, the desperate, youthful reasoning of the narrator makes it logical—the choice to run away is the choice to face his battle alone. Yet, Mark discovers that he isn’t alone: the waitress, the little girl on the bus, the man who offers him a ride are also facing unfairness in their lives, though their pains are different. Another theme in the book is whether telling the truth is helpful or hurtful, as Mark’s best friend, Jessie, agonizes over confessing she knows where Mark is since she promised not to tell. The cliffhanger ending—does Mark live or die?—is frustrating, but it appropriately matches the truth that Mark learns, that things are not always simple and clear and easy, but there’s always hope.

*Contains mild violence.