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What We Saw

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Book Review

What We Saw

Author

Aaron Hartzler

Illustrator

Reviewer

Emma Patton

Rating

Significant Shortcom-

Level

Young Adult

Pages

321

Year

2015

Publisher

HarperTeen

ISBN

9780062338747

Kate has a loyal group of girlfriends, a best friend-turned-boyfriend, and complete loyalty to her school and its athletics program. But one drunken party changes everything. A girl at the high school makes allegations of rape against some of the stars of the basketball team. Suddenly, the whole school is caught up in investigations and news reports. A lot of people in their small town, including adults at the school, accuse the girl who made the allegations of trying to stir things up and make a statement. But nobody seems willing to say what actually happened that night, and Kate starts to wonder whether the allegations might be true. After all, if the town doesn't have any evidence, why do they assume that the victim is lying? The more questions she asks, the more Kate wonders whether it is better to live in ignorance if the truth seems too painful.

What We Saw explores culture's tendency to blame victims in rape cases. Though the book does contain important themes, the depiction of high school contains a lot of cliches and is not very nuanced. It sometimes seems as though each character represents a very basic stereotype of a high schooler, and the characters don't appear to deviate from or progress past these fairly typical definitions. In some ways, the book seems to be specifically designed to help readers to see rape cases found in the media differently, but it also seems like this is done with the least resistance and complexity possible. Also, so much of the story is spent detailing the tumult at school and the confusion around not knowing the real story. But, once more information is revealed and Kate finally speaks up, the story seems to end abruptly from there. The falling action and resolution portions of the narrative arc seem rushed, when some of the most valuable portions of the story could have happened at that point.

*Contains severe language, moderate violence, and moderate sexual content.