Things That Surprise You

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Emily Murphy is starting middle school, and though she’s excited for new beginnings, there’s a few things she wants to stay the same. But Hazel, Emily’s best friend, is ready for everything to be new. She’s found new interests, new crushes, and new friends—leaving Emily behind in the dust. On top of the middle school pressure, Emily has to figure out how to deal with her parents’ still-fresh divorce and her fragile sister, Mina, coming home from an eating disorder treatment center. As Emily struggles to fit in and find her place, she realizes that what she wanted may not be what she needs, and that learning to live with and accept change is a part of life.

This book is relatable for readers young and old. Everyone who has experienced or is experiencing the typical agonies of middle school will be able to connect to Emily’s struggles with wanting to fit in but feeling so out of place. Additionally, the book approaches the issues of divorce and anorexia with sensitivity, but also with realism. The author doesn’t sugarcoat the heartache felt by the characters. The theme of evolving friendships is particularly relevant to middle school kids. Overall, this book is a poignant and tender look at this unique stage of life and is full of self-discovery, authenticity, and wisdom that will ring true for readers of all ages.