



2019

Open If You Dare

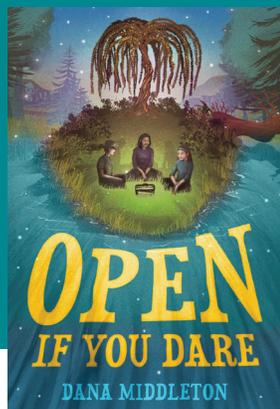
Emily Loveless

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Loveless, Emily (2019) "Open If You Dare," *Children's Book and Media Review*. Vol. 40 : Iss. 5 , Article 30.
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Book Review

Open If You Dare

Author

Dana Middleton

Reviewer

Emily Loveless

Rating

Dependable

Level

Intermediate,
Young Adult

Pages

288

Year

2017

ISBN

9781250085726

Publisher

Feiwel & Friends

Birdie's summer was troublesome enough before a long-buried box with "Open if you dare" written on the lid came into her life. Now, on top of Ally's pitching slump, Rose's imminent removal to Britain, Birdie's annoying younger sister, and unwelcome boy drama, the three best friends have a forty-year old mystery to solve. This is their last summer together, and Birdie is trying to be a good friend, but with so many problems and clues dividing her attention, feelings and people get hurt. To finally lay this mystery to rest and give the summer the send-off it deserves, Birdie and her friends break a mailbox, visit a stranger in a nursing home, delve into the retired and alphabetized stacks at the library, and ultimately snoop under the floorboards in a neighbor's house. The real story behind the mystery isn't anything the girls could have guessed, but by the time the clues are all laid out, the summer has become one none of them will ever forget.

Dana Middleton has written a gripping mystery alongside a genuine and relatable coming-of-age story. Birdie's voice feels natural for her young age without feeling childish, and her reactions and emotions are true to life. The conflicts within the story could feel simplistic, but Middleton presents them to great effect without drifting into melodrama. Birdie's internal struggle with helping Rose plant stink bombs in her house prior to an important showing is a particularly poignant experience of being caught between doing what's right and being a good friend. Young readers will find characters with whom they can relate and also learn from. Middleton manages to touch on common and important topics for her primary audience: navigating pressures within family and friend relationships, responsibility, forgiveness, loss, change, and belonging.