Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

Authors
Julie Whitaker, Polla Cushing, Rodney Woodbury, Brian S. Bishop, Jane Allred, and Natalie Jones

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Student Reviews

A Hall, Barbara. *Dixie Storms*. 

*Dixie Storms* is the story of the struggles of Dutch Peyton and her struggle to understand herself and her relationships. Having her cousin Norma come to visit is an eye opening experience for Dutch. Having grown up in a small farming community, Dutch hasn’t developed all the slick charm of her cousin. Dutch thinks that Norma has it all, until quite suddenly, she discovers that Norma is just as vulnerable as she is. Dutch discovers herself and how to develop relationships in her young life as she faces the hot draught year which destroys their tobacco crop, and the effects of divorce, as well as the lack of communication and subsequent misunderstandings.

*Dixie Storms* is a very well-written, easy to read book. It skillfully deals with the issues and effects on family ties and the effects of divorce on these ties and relationships. The characters retain a human quality which makes them believable and interesting. I would recommend this book as valuable for young readers. It even would have appeal to older readers because it deals with universal subjects that are part of our society.

—Julie Whitaker

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A Hobbs, Will. *Downriver*. 

When Jessie and her "Discovery Unlimited" companions hijack their instructor’s boat for a ten day joyride on the Grand Canyon’s Colorado River, they get much more than they bargained for. Confused about her new life, angry at her father, and blaming him for "banishing" her to the outdoor school, Jessie sees their escapade as a way to demonstrate that she is no longer a child. She is quickly drawn to Troy’s natural leadership and clear, blue eyes, but soon realizes that his need for power is ultimately terrifying, even destructive. Troy’s leadership is challenged by Freddy’s quiet, sound judgment, and the group is split into factions at a time when unity is most essential. Low on food, chased by park rangers in helicopters, injured, and at the mercy of the bone-chilling October rains, the group must still face the most dangerous rapids of the Grand Canyon. In the thick of the action, when survival depends on their combined skill, judgment and teamwork,
Jessie finds hidden inner strength and learns to take responsibility—thinking and acting for herself. She emerges from the canyon with new friendships, a greater appreciation for her father, and a newfound maturity that gives her hope to meaningfully shape her new life.

The best part of this survival adventure is that it shows human nature pushed to the limit. Jessie learns that appearances are deceiving, and that teamwork is essential for survival, both in the canyon and in the world beyond. The conflicts among group members are skillfully set against the merciless power of the river. The author brings the river to life, seizing the reader's attention with action-packed descriptions of the rapids which the rafters must conquer. The final chapters, however, seem to wind down too quickly, and the characters are provided with an easy, and somewhat unrealistic rescue right before their biggest challenge. Except for the tidy conclusion, this book is enthralling and provides the reader with valuable insights into human nature and one's hidden potential. I recommend it highly as a powerful coming-of-age story for anyone who likes adventure with a touch of romance.

—Natalie Jones

Rosie Rabbit wants to bake pies, but mother is too tired. She has been taking care of Rosie's baby brother Fat Mat. While mother takes a nap, Rosie carries Fat Mat outside to play. Can she help it if he gets all messy? When Mother gets angry with her, Rosie runs away from home. Under the weeping willow tree, Rosie realizes how much her family will miss her if she really stays away.

The water colors flow with this story and make it come to life as we walk with Rosie through green grass and colorful splashes of flowers. The pictures of the little rabbit home portray a sense of love and security, and the simple drawings reveal Rosie's character with gentleness and depth as we watch her struggle to find her place in her family. This book rightfully joins the ranks of other good books (such as Russell Hoban's A Baby Sister For Francis) written to help preschoolers deal with a new sibling in the house.

—Jane Allred

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B Smith, Marya. Winter-Broken. 

This book deals with a young girl named Dawn. Dawn struggles to overcome the insecurity she feels which was instilled in her by her harsh family environment. Her father is abusive, insensitive, domineering, alcoholic, and absent while her mother works two jobs and spends little time with the family. The story further reveals Dawn’s fight for independence and discovery of her own self-worth.

Winter-Broken reveals through third person narration the psychological effects of abusive and absent parents on children: Dawn experiences fear, anxiety, frustration, and she searches for love, acceptance and security. The book becomes most revealing as the narrator describes Dawn’s elation when she assumes the responsibility of caring for a horse, which Dawn names Wildfire, on a nearby ranch. Marya Smith avoids sentimentality while creating empathy in the reader towards the protagonist, leaving the reader with greater insight into the desires, aspirations, and fears of a child. No objectionable scenes and only a minor bit of language.

—Brian S. Bishop

A Tunis, John R. The Kid Comes Back. 
FI 245 pp.

In The Kid Comes Back, author John Tunis recreates the magic of baseball hero, Roy Tucker, made popular in two of his previous novels, The Kid from Tomkinsville and World Series. The Kid Comes Back is the story of Tucker’s summons to fight in World War II at the peak of his baseball career with the Brooklyn Dodgers. It describes his air squadron Fried Spratt’s subsequent crash in Occupied France and their escape. Aided by the French Underground, despite Roy’s immobilizing leg injury, they get back. The story ends with Roy’s fight to recover and his return to major league baseball. It is a warm story championing at once the indispensable values of comradeship, and individual human fortitude.

While Roy’s struggle to return to baseball is perhaps anticlimactic after his squadron’s suspenseful escape from Occupied France, nevertheless sports lovers everywhere will appreciate Tunis’s baseball knowledge and depiction of true athletic courage. Tunis’s narrator personae moves subtly back and forth from grandstand observer to apparent clubhouse insider, allowing for simultaneous objectivity and
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credibility with the reader. Without appearing overly didactic, Tunis effectively separates the playland world of baseball from "the real world," exploring Roy’s grapple with an often neglected, yet essential question that every modern athlete needs to ask—If I can’t play anymore, what then? Roy Tucker is not always, or even most often, the story’s wisest character, but he is the narrative’s most intense soul-searcher. Using his protagonist’s introspective character, Tunis is free to explore such themes as proper education, prejudice, the-grass-is-always-greener-on-the-other-side-of-the-fence syndrome, faith in humanity, and owning up to honest mistakes. Even though the book’s title makes its ending highly predictable, Tunis avoids the sentimental two-out, bottom-of-the-ninth home run finale. Instead, our hero succeeds simply because he never ceases to come back from defeat.

Whether history buff, baseball fan, or just lover of the triumphant human spirit, every reader will want to come back to "The Kid" as often as he comes back. I highly recommend The Kid Comes Back to readers of all ages.

—Rodney Woodbury

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Thirteen year old scientist-to-be, Nellie Brown is excited to spend a summer at a beach cottage with her grandmother. She is even more excited when she finds an old chemistry set in the basement of the cottage. The box containing the chemistry set reads "McFinney’s Powerful Potions." The set instructions promise that the one personalized wish a child received would make the "impossible become possible." Because Nellie loves her grandmother so much, she decides that her one wish will be used to make her grandmother young again. But the experiment goes out of control and Nellie watches in horror as her grandmother gets younger and younger, and finally begins to disappear. It takes the timely visit of Nellie’s cousin, Ben, and some advice from the salt McFinney of McFinney’s Magnificent Mysteries to undo Nellie’s thoughtful but ill-fated experiment.

I would recommend this book for several reasons. First, the book begins at the climax of the story, then flashes back to the story’s beginning. This grabs the reader’s attention and draws them into the story. The second reason relates to the first. The story’s premise is catchy. Nellie loves her grandmother and does something wild to make her young and healthy again. The story keeps our attention because we are anxious to see if the experiment works, and then to see if it can be
reversed. The *Summer I Shrank My Grandmother* is a fun fantasy book for students in the sixth to eighth grade.

—Polla Cushing

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