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Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

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**Reviewed by V. Mo’unga**

*The Warnings* is Margaret Buffie’s second novel with a supernatural twist. Her first, *The Haunting of Frances Rain*, won the 1987 Young Adult Canadian Book Award.

In the beginning, Rachel is dropped off at an aunt’s home by her father who recently decided to sell their farm. Her father wants to go drive a truck and find himself. A short time before, Rachel’s mother also deserted her. Rachel doesn’t know her aunt well. When she enters the house, she finds a strange group of older people who also live in the house. She decides to "tolerate" the Fossils (as she privately calls them) for a week before running away, but finds that they need her as much as she needs them. They have a secret which involves Rachel and her living with them, but they are afraid to let her in on it. Rachel meets a boy down the street who is intelligent, although he talks a mile a minute and goes in ten directions at once. Together, they learn the Fossils’ secret and attempt to solve the problem.

In this fast-paced, unpredictable mystery, Rachel learns about family love, anger, and accepting protection from an unlikely source. She learns that people, especially parents, have reasons for their behavior that aren’t readily seen by children who haven’t always known them. Rachel changes to overcome her anger and distrust of people so she can protect those whom she loves. An unusual book written in an inoffensive manner.

● ● ● ●


**Reviewed by Stephanie Carpenter**

Andy cannot believe his mother would tell him such a lie. How could it possibly be true that his real father didn’t want him to live with him?

Everything had changed since Andy’s parents got divorced and remarried. Having a new man around the house is more than he can bear, especially one who treats his mom that way. Andy decides that the only thing left for him to do is run away and somehow get to England to see his real father who certainly still wants him. But it’s not going to be as easy as he had hoped. Finding a key
to a hotel suite gives him a place to hideout while he makes his plans. But that’s not all he finds. Andy has a handful of interesting and down-right frightening experiences that help him understand where he really needs to run.

Andy’s story is a delightful one of suspense and adventure; but beyond that, it thoughtfully explores human relationships and the difficulties encountered by adolescents when families are torn apart and then put back together again.


Reviewed by Kim Abegglen

*Outside Looking In*, by James Lincoln Collier, is a story about fourteen year-old Fergy Wheeler, struggling to find a life of normalcy in both education and peer interaction. Fergy’s father, a left-over hippie from the Vietnam era, is opposed to the middle class values Fergy so desperately wants to embrace. Fergy’s mother, a disgruntled follower of her husband’s philosophy, is torn between her loyalty to her husband and the welfare of her children.

At fourteen, Fergy becomes restless with living in a van and traveling around the Eastern states with his family. He dislikes selling scams and stealing from innocent people. Fergy longs to go to school and fears that, as he falls farther and farther behind, he will be resigned to thievery for the rest of his life. When Fergy’s father and his band steal a new motorhome from an elderly couple who have befriended Fergy and his little sister, Ooma, Fergy decides he must run away. Together, Fergy and Ooma set out to find their mother’s wealthy parents. For Fergy, his grandparents represent hope for a happy, stable life. What he unexpectedly discovers, helps him to better understand his parents as well as himself.

Those who love an exciting yet moving novel will enjoy this story. *Outside Looking In* is filled with adventure and insight. The story seems geared to an older, young adult audience; the post-hippie era may be difficult to relate to for a younger age group. Though the story has some profanity, the author has utilized it with discretion and taste.
Cassy Phelan is a teenager with an uncertain past. She hasn’t seen her father since she was a toddler, and her mother is too unreliable to take care of her, so she lives with her grandmother in an apartment in England. One morning, Cassy’s grandmother sends her on the subway to live with her mother while her grandmother takes care of some "private business." Cassy builds a friendship with her mother in her new life and begins learning about her father’s strange past. In many ways, her father is like a lone wolf.

This book does a good job of developing the relationship between Cassy and her mother, but it becomes too silly near the end when Cassy finds out her father is a ruthless murderer. Cassy has to save her grandmother, all by herself, because no adults will believe her story that her father is holding her grandmother hostage for some plastic explosives Cassy has found. Give me a break!


First Wedding, Once Removed is a delightful story about the relationship between a college freshman, Gib, and his younger sister, Alwilda (better known as Pokie). Gib and Pokie have a terrific relationship! They love to spend time together. Visiting an airfield, and dreaming about their first flying lesson, is their favorite pastime. The novel begins in the summertime. Gib is preparing to leave for college, and Pokie is nervous about starting high school. The two of them spend most of the summer together. Pokie even ignores her best friend, Junior, because she feels she is too mature for him.

Well, Gib goes to college and Pokie misses him greatly. Pokie soon finds out that Gib has a girlfriend and she is jealous—in a sisterly way. When summer finally arrives, Gib comes home, and Pokie is ready for a great summer with him. However, Pokie soon learns that Nell is coming to visit and she is disappointed. Although Pokie had previously decided she would not like Nell, Pokie and Nell became very good friends. In the end, Nell and Gib get married, and Pokie pays for Gib’s first flying lesson as a wedding present.

First Wedding, Once Removed is a very appropriate book with no violence, no swearing, no sex, and no substance abuse. It is clean and well-written. It
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is very appropriate for a younger sibling who is dealing with brother’s or sister’s leaving for college or getting married. It is very sympathetic to their views and concerns in dealing with these matters. I would definitely recommend it for teenage reading material.


Reviewed by James Bell

The Third Ward is Wanda Ryszinsky’s new home in the Hessian State Hospital for Children with Tuberculosis. Compounding the censorship of letters and the infrequency of visiting days, a winter fog isolates the hospital from the outside world—occupied Germany in the 1950’s. Soon after her arrival, Wanda is initiated to death—a constant presence in the hospital. With her friends, P. T., Carla, and the Empress, Wanda finds ways to deal with her illness, death, and the tedium of hospital life. Wanda and the others find diversion in paper cut art (P. B.’s specialty), breaking rules, thinking about boys (Carla’s contribution), looking for opportunities to escape, and listening to the exotic tales the Empress tells of her China. Because they give Wanda a sense of both escape and purpose, Wanda does not question the verity of the Empress’s stories, but travels willingly with her imagination. Yet in the end, Wanda feels mixed emotions as she deals with a separation different from death.

*On the Third Ward* is a sensitive, yet accurate treatment of death, serious illness, and growing up. Only three things might mar this book for some audiences: Nurse Walter’s frequent reference to the patients as bastards, Wanda’s damning of this person or that thing, and two references to castration. Although the first two items seem intrusive at times, the references to the eunuch of the hospital are not distasteful. The book’s tone and theme, however, are uplifting and beautiful. By the end, the reader is all but a full-fledged resident of the ward, lacking only the disease and personal experience to be fully initiated. In a very readable style, T. Degens effectively opens the window into both the joys and pains of the Third Ward.

Reviewed by Kristin L. Ballif

In the book *The Dragon of Middlethorpe*, Kate, a thirteen-year-old girl who loves to always be in the middle of the action, soon finds herself amongst hunters for the big dragon hunt. Kate’s desires to think of her own ideas, and to read and write, do not follow the norm for young maidens in the Medieval era. She loves herbs and grains and desires to be an apprentice for the good and gentle Master Clement, the town apothecary. When rumors begin of a dragon in the town of Middlethorpe, Kate desires to ride along with the townsmento hunt the dragon. Kate has heard stories of this dragon all her life, and now, she wants to see it with her own eyes. As all her attempts to ride with the men fail, Kate decides to go by herself. With her, she takes the magical unicorn horn dust that Master Clement has said will destroy the dragon and save the men. Along her travels into the dreaded forest, Kate meets “Mad Rose” an old woman who has been driven out of the town because she doesn’t believe that dragons exist. After talking with Mistress Rose—who really isn’t mad at all—Kate also begins to question if dragons really do exist.

*The Dragon of Middlethorpe* is a delightful book of adventure, romance, and the supernatural. It reveals some of the conflicts that young women struggled against during this time period and still struggle with today. It also puts into question the beliefs that we have and why we believe them. This is an excellent book for all ages and it gives us a timely lesson.

★★★★


Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

From gypsies, dogs, witches, magical jewelry, and ghostly headless skiers, Judith Gorog fascinates her readers with fun, spooky stories. Judith Gorog takes stories that she and her children have heard before, and stories that she has imagined herself, and weaves them all together to create this mystical book of eerie stories, told by ghostly visitors of the past.

Poor Farm Elementary School is nearing its last existence because of a magical spring that is rising up beneath it. Every year, the 8th grade class has a tradition of making pillows from old rayon parachutes, while relating stories. This year will be no exception, even if it is in November. While making these
pillows, strange visitors appear to tell their own stories, contributing to the long-standing tradition that soon must come to an end.

I strongly recommend this book because although the stories are eerie, they are not at all grotesque or graphic. There is also not one place where profanity or anything inappropriate appears. The stories are fun, imaginative, and clean. These are the perfect stories to be told around a camp fire, over and over again. A fun book to read around Halloween time.


Reviewed by Stacy L. Miller

*The Day That Elvis Came To Town* is a novel about a young girl, Wanda, and her experiences growing up in her mother’s boarding house in southern Georgia, during 1964. Wanda struggles through her mother’s problems with money and boarders, her father’s alcohol problem, and racial segregation during the 1960’s. Wanda is Elvis’ number one fan, and she listens to his records as an escape when things around the boarding house seem too difficult for her to handle. Her mother’s new boarder, Mercedes, moves into the home and seems to make everything come to life. During Mercedes’ stay, the mother and father seem to be able to make their struggling marriage put itself together and the father attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, putting his drinking problem behind him. The most developed relationship in the novel, however, is the one between Wanda and Mercedes. It just so happens, that Mercedes went to school with Elvis, and even had her picture taken with him! Wanda is a little disappointed to find out that 41 other people had their picture taken with Elvis, as the photograph Mercedes has is her class picture. Throughout the novel, the reader learns that Mercedes was only in Elvis’ class for about two months. The school was a segregated one, and when the principal learned that Mercedes was half black, he sent her away. Wanda must confront racism and prejudice when one of her mother’s other boarders threatens to call the police for white boarding houses are not allowed to rent to Negroes.

I recommend the novel for young readers who are having a difficult time dealing with parents or family members who are alcoholic—or who do not understand how alcoholism affects a family—and for young readers who don’t quite understand the impact of segregation and prejudice on a community. There are no graphic or disturbing scenes in this novel, nor is there any profanity. During one incident, however, one of the boarders refers to Mercedes as a “nigger girl,” which might offend some readers.

Reviewed by Nicole Haueter

When Preston is eleven-years-old it looks as though his parents are heading for divorce. There is constant fighting and they finally separate. He goes with his father to his grandparents’ home and his little brother, Tyler, lives with his mother. Preston knows that his father is desperately trying to get his mother to reconcile but his mother refuses. His father begins to lose touch with reality and eventually kills the mother and attempts to kill himself. He is tried and accepts a plea bargain which puts him in prison for two years. Meanwhile, Preston and his brother are left to deal with their anger and loss. The book continues after his father is released and the rest centers around the trial that Preston has in dealing with his father’s guilt and remorse. This story is based on true events.

One interesting factor about this young adult novel, that I think will appeal to boys, is the author’s use of first person point of view coming from Preston himself. Shusterman, the author, uses a present tense stream-of-consciousness technique that lets the reader experience exactly what Preston is feeling, as he is feeling it. The sentences are short and easy to read and the plot moves quickly. Preston is a track and football star, but he acknowledges that it is still all right to cry. He explains that sometimes it can’t be helped. There is also an excellent message about forgiveness in this novel. Preston is a good example of this, and so are his mother’s parents. Preston is a believable character because of his mixed emotions in surviving the ordeal with his father. Although not many students can relate to the experience of having a father kill a mother, there is also lot to be said about coming to accept one’s parents for who they are. I would recommend this novel for the above reasons.
Sam's world is OK.
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