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Student Reviews

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Student Reviews


Reviewed by Francoise Boden

For all high school seniors, graduation is a turning point. Upon graduation, young people have to make important decisions such as whether to go to college or not. Eighteen-year-old, Dru Driscoll is one of those graduates. She lives in a middle-class Southern California beach town. In Eve Bunting’s *Jumping the Nail* Dru relates her story and the story of her girlfriend, Elisa.

Dru is the steady girlfriend of the most popular and richest boy in town, Mike Moriarty. Mike is the kind of young man every girl in high school has ever dreamed of: he’s the leader of the in-crowd; he is handsome, kind and considerate. Elisa, who does not feel good about her identity, dates Mike’s friend, Scooter Navarro, because she wants to belong to the "cool" beach crowd. Scooter is almost as poplar as Mike. He is also as much insensitive to Elisa’s self-esteem problems as Mike is supportive of Dru’s college ambitions. Scooter is stereotyped as the shallow, conceited, good-looking Southern California beach boy. *Jumping* begins a few days after graduation. Scooter has announced that he and Elisa (against her will, she wants to please him) will jump the Nail. The Nail is a 90-foot high seacliff. No one believes they will jump since many years before the same jump caused death and paralyzing accidents. They do jump, and that jump "triggers a powerful chain of events that Dru and Mike try desperately to stop before it leads to tragedy."

Ultimately, feelings come out; lessons are learned by all. The lesson is positive for Dru. She finds out how mature she is in making decisions and fighting her own insecurities. On the other hand, Elisa’s life will be lost in the turmoil.

The setting and characters are reminiscent of the popular teen TV series, *Beverly Hills 90210*. Dru’s character is the only one developed as she narrates her peers’ story. As a character, Elisa could have been more elaborate since the plot centers around her more towards the end. We realize something is wrong with Elisa as we are constantly warned by foreshadowings. Although we understand Elisa’s instability, the ending is still a shock. We truly hoped that Dru and Mike could stop her. Parents don’t play an important role in this story. Except for Dru’s parents, they are aloof to their children’s problems.

*Jumping* is readable by all as there is never any offensive material. But, do not read it if you are sensitive about a subject as tense as teen depression and suicide.

★★★★

Reviewed by Heather O’Donnell

In *The Faces of Ceti*, Mary Caraker portrays the lives of a group of adventurous earth dwellers who have left an environmentally ravaged earth to seek a better life on another planet. During the voyage two political factions develop and one group, including Maya, a twelve year old girl, and her family decides to try their hand at colonizing a nearby planet, Ceti. Maya’s growth and development into womanhood are charted against the struggles faced by the new colony in creating a viable society. Maya faces the ordinary struggles of youth along with the poignant challenges of losing her father, her mother’s remarriage and the difficulties of adjusting to life on a new planet.

Mary Caraker creates an enjoyable and adventurous plot which will appeal to a great many young adults. The only criticism would be that in spots the plot does not provide enough information to substantiate some of Maya’s conclusions concerning her sister’s behavior and the behavior of the Hlur. The plot does, however provide an excellent opportunity to discuss the issues of women’s rights, animal rights, government, prejudice, environmental issues and male and female roles in society. The concepts of sexuality and reproduction are discussed, but there are no scenes that could be remotely considered objectional.


Reviewed by Hillary Huerner

In Jessie Close’s *The Warping of Al*, Al and his three sisters struggle to assert themselves before their overbearing and insensitive father. Al wants to be a chef but his father thinks that is not a masculine enough profession and wants him to enter the mineral business. In an effort to make him more masculine, Al’s father takes him along on a business trip to South America, but Al spends his days there in the hotel while his father is at meetings. One of Al’s sisters gets pregnant while he is gone and so he is sent home early. Ultimately, each of the children breaks away from the home and family: Al goes to work in a grocery store in an effort to earn money for culinary school, E. (Ethel) moves out with her son, Dotty gets married (for the first of many times), and Frave moves in with one of her professors. Only at the death of
their grandmother "Goopie" do they come back home together and the emotional healing process begins.

Although the ideas of asserting oneself and letting go of pride are strongly expressed, and although the relationship that Al has with his grandmother is tender and thought-provoking ("Goopie" speaks in legends which become the symbolic backbone of the story), there are several disturbing scenes and a lot of vulgar language. Sex is treated lightly, and the dialogue is frequently crude. The children have no respect for their father, a fact which shows clearly in their words. The mother is portrayed as a victim. The issues the book raises are certainly important, but the treatment of those issues is distasteful.


A 7-8 FI Reviewed by Tami Lenker

The newspaper says the world will come to an end in only a few months. Tim (thirteen years old) is not sure that he believes at first, but he finally decides that if it is true, he had better accomplish some of the things that he’s always wanted to do. Tim’s English teacher suggests that he make a list of goals he would like to accomplish before the end of the world. Tim makes list after list and finally narrows his goals down to four. First, he decides to fight Dunk Bolander, a tough guy who always bullies him. Second, he plans to apologize for the racial slur that someone has painted on the sidewalk in front of his next door neighbor’s house. Third, he wants to hitch rides on his sled along a particularly exciting route. And fourth, he wants to kiss the girl of his dreams, Judy Feldon. Tim eventually accomplishes all these goals and grows up in the meantime.

Although the story takes place in the late 1920’s, Tim comes in contact with some of the same problems teenagers face today. The story is uplifting in that it teaches about moral courage and self-confidence, but it is also amusing and entertaining.

Corbin writes a simple and down-to-earth novel with an especially likeable and believable narrator. The book is well written and presents a fun story and some good values.

★★★★★

Reviewed by Joan Webb

Eleven-year-old Cherry Dobbs and her twin brother, Sam, who help their father run his freight boat on the Juanita Canal in 1842 set off for a great adventure when they find that a plot has been hatched to steal the manuscript that the famed Charles Dickens is working on. Dickens is touring America and hasn’t noticed that his book has been stolen. Cherry and Sam take part in a chase to inform Dickens and save his book. They race from boat to boat up the canal hoping to beat the crooks and save the day.

The story had a fun plot, yet I found myself wanting more. I felt at times that I knew what was going to happen next. I also felt that some of the conversations in the book sounded stilted—they didn’t sound natural. Some of the expressions also sounded odd (I wondered if they really were from that time period). The boat descriptions and use on the canal also seemed to be a little too much detailed. I wanted to hear more about the characters and less about the boats, but I must admit that as I read the book, I became more interested. The story line was amusing, and I think that young adolescents would like the book, but I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone over the age of twelve.


Reviewed by Margaret Cressman

*Keep Laughing*, by Cynthia D. Grant, is about a 15 year-old boy named Shepard Youngman. Shep’s parents have been divorced since he was a baby. Shep saw his father a few times when he was little, but his father did not play a major role in Shep’s life. Suddenly, Shep’s father starts coming around, buying Shep expensive gifts, and he even wants Shep to come and live with him. Moving out is very tempting for Shep, because he is sick of his mother treating him like a baby. Shep is caught having to choose between leaving his mother, after all of her love and support throughout his life, and living with his father, whom he doesn’t really even know.

Although Shep is 15 years old, a junior high school student would enjoy reading the book. Shep learns to deal with the reality that parents are not perfect, but they usually have good intentions for their children. Shep learns the importance of responsibility and maturity. I would recommend this book because it deals with the struggles of divorce very well.

Reviewed by Jill Anderson

The mysterious, old house in the woods holds a secret that only Bridget can uncover. Being overweight and adopted is a detriment to her until she meets Elissa.

Bridget’s adoptive mother died several years before and her adoptive father is now raising Bridget, the twins, and six year old Morgan who refuses to talk. Bridget feels her father doesn’t love her and is upset that the family is spending the summer at the lake, that is until she and Morgan discover the house. Bridget meets Elissa, an artist and an equestrian, at the house. Elissa helps her find herself and her birth father.

The reader becomes quickly intrigued with the mystery the old house holds and Bridget’s struggle to find out who she is. *The House in the Woods* is suspenseful and wonderfully written. It is easy for the reader to become lost in Bridget’s life and triumph with her as she discovers the love she longs for.

★★★★


Reviewed by Raymond Ringhiser

The book immediately captures the teenage reader’s interest by starting with Alec’s (who is in junior high school and is extremely tall for his age) waking up in the morning. The core of the story revolves around Alec’s feelings of awkwardness made worse by his overly enthusiastic father who is always pressuring Alec about his basketball games and grades, two of Alec’s least favorite subjects. Alec has an older sister, the "perfect child" with whom he is always being compared. The third child in the family is Alec’s younger brother, Stevie, whom Alec sees as his replacement in his parents’ favor.

While in the mall with his friends, Alec, forced to take Stevie with him meets an old bag-lady who gives him a token and tells him to use it to make a wish. When Alec makes use of this token by wishing Stevie had never been born, he finds himself in a family that he considers miserable. He then sets out (with the aid of a beautiful girl named Abbey whom he met by helping the old woman in the mall) to find the old woman. The two finally discover her in a downtown hospital where she is dying. Alec asks for another token in order to wish his brother returned but the woman refuses. A few moments later she dies. However, at the end of the novel, Abbey gives Alec a token (given her
40 Brigham Young University

by the old woman) because she thinks that it would prove a special remembrance to Alec. He then rushes to his room and makes the wish for Stevie to return, which he does.

I recommend the book for its perceptivity of many of the problems that all teenagers face: sibling competition; high parental expectations; gender relationships; and family relationships. I feel that the book will allow any teenage reader to relate to the problems that Alec faces and enjoy seeing how he handles them. Another attractive element of the novel is the way that the author portrays the idea that Alec is no less of a "cool" teenager for discovering that he truly loves his family and, particularly, his little brother Stevie.


**B 5-9 FI**

Reviewed by Natalie Abendroth

Anna, a German immigrant girl now living in Canada, is about to embark on her first day of high school. Her trauma may be considered normal except for the fact that she has severely impaired vision, and needs special help in order to do simple tasks like reading the board or the exam questions. To add to her anxiety, World War II is beginning, and Anna is afraid that her brother or father may be called to the war effort.

Anna is a loveable, and believable character. Despite her eye trouble, she loves poetry, and quotes it frequently. The book contains heart-warming advice for those who may fear their first day of high school (such as smiling at people when you meet). Its message on faith is poetic: "Faith is when you hear the bird singing before it is hatched." The novel portrays adults as real people with problems and advice of their own.


**B 7 FI**

Reviewed by Peggy Robertson

As a companion to *A, My Name is Ami, B, My Name is Bunny* and *C, My Name is Cal* Norma Fox Mazer's *D, My Name is Danita* is a clean romance novel for the junior high age reader.
Danita Merritt, her sister Lizabeth, and her parents Daniel and Jody seem the perfect middle-class family. Even Danita’s wild best friend Laredo agrees that Danita’s family is pretty good.

One day while at the mall Danita and Laredo meet a strange nineteen year old college student who introduces himself as D. T. Goodman. Over the next few weeks Danita catches D. T. following her. Though he’s always polite and friendly, Danita is apprehensive. In desperation she confronts D. T. about his sneaky behavior. He explains that his mother is Donna Goodman, a former high school sweetheart of Danita’s father Daniel. When Donna became pregnant her parents moved her to California, and she was never allowed to tell her boyfriend Daniel that they had a son. Now nineteen years later, D. T. has come in search of his father. Although the news shakes the family up, they all readily accept D. T. as a long lost son. The resolution is too fast and too perfect for my taste, but everyone ends up happy and fulfilled.

This book is ideal for light reading because the plot, though simple, is entertaining. There is no bad language and only a bit of impropriety regarding teen pregnancy. In general, this book will be enjoyed by 7th and 8th grade girls who want to lose themselves in a clean and easy to read romance novel.

★★★★