Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

Authors

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A 7-8 FI

Reviewed by Bob Eckery

*The Dreamkeepers* is a literary journey that fills the mind with fantastic details of a family’s vacation to snowy Wales. The wintery climate sets the scene for an exciting adventure for Derek, the young protagonist, and his sister, Eve.

The two children have never before vacationed in Wales, but the intrigue begins when they find the scenery unusually familiar. Derek and Eve piece together the sights and realize that they have seen these places before—in their dreams.

Rhonabwy Court is where the mystery looms, and Derek is first to discover that the library of Rhonabwy Court is the origin of all dreams. A cast of old “dreamkeepers” congregate there and produce dreams for all the world. But an evil sorceress intends to eliminate all dreams. The fates of the world’s dreamers rest on the shoulders of young Derek.

I would recommend this book to young readers who thirst for adventure. *The Dreamkeepers* is a fantasy book, but the story is realistic enough to keep most readers captivated and interested.

★★★★


B 7 FI

Reviewed by Shari L. Payne

Thirteen-year-old Tracy and her family have just moved from Boston to the small beach town of Essex, where Tracy’s father was raised. Somehow Tracy’s excitement does not match that of her father as she tries to make friends and adapt to a new environment. As if this adjustment isn’t enough, Tracy learns that she was adopted. Her birth mother, who was raised in the same small town, was very popular.
Tracy spends the summer struggling to learn more about herself and about her birth mother, Felicia. Because Tracy strongly resembles Felicia, deranged Henry Polk mistakes Tracy for her mother and seeks to harm her.

Tracy eventually finds that her problems are small in comparison to her new friend David, who has lost his family in an accident. Through helping him, she discovers that "family" consists of those who care about you, not necessarily those who are blood-related.

Corcoran creates believable characters and places them in intriguing situations. The plot is unique, yet believable. The foreshadowing however, is overdone and lessens the suspense.

Corcoran’s message to adopted young adults is comforting and realistic. Young adults can learn from Tracy’s experience to accept their families for what they are—people who care for and love them.

*Family Secrets* is well written, but it would be most appropriate for an audience of adopted young adults.


Before he was killed, Ben Daggett’s father set the record for catching the biggest striped bass in the annual "Striped Bass Derby" in the town of Martha’s Vineyard. Now Ben’s mother is seeing another man, one whom Ben dislikes because he is so unlike his father. Like his father Ben loves to fish, and he and his best friend also compete in the Striped Bass Derby. While fishing, Ben overhears two men plotting to cheat to win the derby, break Ben’s father’s record, and win the $10,000 prize. Ben attempts to uncover the conspiracy because his father’s record means so much to him. In the end, his mother’s boyfriend actually exposes the man, and Ben’s father’s record still stands. Ben and his mother come to better terms, and Ben appreciates and comes to like her boyfriend.

While attempting to explore pertinent and sensitive subjects, the book does so in a semi-shallow way. The characters are not developed fully, and I was left with the feeling that I had just read a plot summary. However, the book is not altogether poor and may be interesting to those who love fishing.

B 4-6 FI  Reviewed by Lisa R. Zocchi

While researching a unit on "Life in Our Area Three Hundred Years Ago," several middle school students (who are also detectives known as the McGurk Organization) become intrigued by a town record that declares that a thirteen-year-old had been accused of witchcraft in 1692. Since the accused, Hester Bidgood, was a fellow detective—"an investigatrix of evill deedes"—the student detectives feel that they should travel back in time to help her escape her terrible fate. The book describes their dangerous adventure in the New England of 1692.

This book offers some interesting historical tidbits of the period of the witch-hunt craze. Readers learn that the witch scare may have been exploited for economic gain. They also become familiar with the physical traits associated with witches, as well as the tests used to confirm these suspicions. Although the logic and plot are weak at times and the dialogue is reminiscent of the *Scooby Doo* cartoons, young readers may enjoy this educational adventure.


A 7-8 FI  Reviewed by Hannivett Durand

Alice Larsen, a Korean girl adopted by American parents as a baby, has everything going for her. A seventh grader, she has just made the cheerleading squad and has captured the attention of the most popular boy in school. However, when a Korean family moves into town, her problems begin.

Alice likes to think of herself only as an American. Her lack of interest in anything Korean conflicts with her parents' encouragement to befriend her new classmate Yoon Jun, the son of the new Korean family.

*If It Hadn't Been for Yoon Jun* presents the conflict between the old and new world for a young Korean immigrant. Marie G. Lee does an excellent job of portraying Alice's struggle to accept her cultural heritage and to assimilate it.

Eckery et al.: Student Reviews

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Reviewed by B. Renée Jenkins

Phoebe explains, "The summer I turned twelve, I left my grandmother and the home I’d always known and set off to find my father, a man I’d never met. There were four of us on that journey. Bertie and Bishop and Billy and I." In this matter-of-fact fashion, the travels of a young girl from a sleepy small town unfold. From the minute the four main characters load their suitcases into Gram’s old car, this ordinary beginning evolves into an extraordinary tale.

What should have been a simple trip from Georgia to Virginia is complicated by a charging bull, an unreliable car, and insufficient funds. Phoebe also learns from other unexpected challenges, such as her dealing with her feelings toward a father she has never met, the meaning of friendship and parting, the reality of prejudice, and the difficulty of adolescence. The physical elements of the journey become the medium for a journey of the heart.

Marino creatively combines unusual elements and characters as she weaves the story of Phoebe’s unique journey. Bizarre but lovable characters combined with poignant and humorous episodes provide the backdrop for the themes of the novel. Although the plot is not entirely realistic, the characterization is captivating. I recommend this intriguing account of the travels of a young girl, a butler, a cook, and a chauffeur, who together find adventure and meaning.


Reviewed by Alaina Stone

When Karyn and her brother Mike overhear their uncle say he never wanted to adopt them, they both want to be anywhere but their uncle’s house. Much to their surprise, their wish is immediately granted, and Karyn and Mike find themselves at Stonehenge in 1400 B.C.

After this first unexpected experience with time travel, Karyn and Mike begin exploring the past, trying to find a place in which to live, away from their uncle. While they travel back and forth, they encounter other travellers like themselves, and together they set out to explore history.

However, when they return to the twentieth century and find it completely changed, Karyn, Mike, and their new friends embark on a quest to discover what part of history they changed and to try to set it right.
Though the protagonists range in ages from twelve to fourteen (plus one seven-year-old), readers of that age might have a problem with two aspects of the story. First, one chapter contains a detailed discussion of time travel—including some very abstract theories. Second, this book relies heavily on history, especially Greek history and the Homeric tradition. Most twelve-year-olds aren’t familiar with *The Odyssey*, so the allusions to it might be confusing.

The second half of the book flows better than the first and includes a wonderful dinosaur hunt. If young readers can overcome the difficulties of the time travel theory and history, they should enjoy this story of time, brothers and sisters, and friendship.


Reviewed by Jennifer Dixon

How did you feel in eighth grade? Self-conscious? Anxious to fit in? Sunita Sen, a second-generation American, feels no different. Sunni’s goal to fit in is hampered, however, when her grandparents come from India to stay with her family. Soon her mother dons the traditional “saree,” the smell of curry and incense pervade the house, and Sunni is too embarrassed to bring her American friends home—particularly Michael, the boy she likes. Sunni’s juggling of the two cultures creates both funny and touching moments that any kid who just wants to fit in is sure to understand.

Noteworthy are the positive depiction of racial and cultural differences and the example of an integrated society that’s comfortable with itself. The book also shows how Sunita learns to be proud, not ashamed, of her heritage—an important lesson for anyone grappling with two cultures. Moreover, American readers with little exposure to other cultures will learn that Sunita is just like any other eighth-grade girl—with the same thoughts, feelings, interests, and worries.


Reviewed by Kristi R. Redwine

*One Earth, a Multitude of Creatures* is an informative, interesting nonfiction book. The picture book features animals from the Pacific
Northwest—including owls, bears, trout, toads, and caterpillars. The authors explain the daily activities of each animal and show that animals depend on one another and a healthy environment for their survival.

A prologue describes the authors' purpose, lists the animals by species, and provides information about the authors and illustrator. The wording is simple enough for young readers, and the sentences flow smoothly. I particularly enjoyed the group names that were used: litter of pups, swarm of bees, hover of trout, and sleuth of bears.

The illustrations were helpful as well. Kells portrays each animal and its environment in wonderful detail. This book can be used by teachers to present different animals of the Northwest and their behaviors and habitat. Through vivid and large pictures and creatively descriptive words, the authors and illustrator effectively describe Pacific Northwest animals.


Reviewed by Ron Christiansen

As twins, Hannah’s and Rosie’s lives revolve around each other until their father, Joe Delaney, a famous reggae musician, returns to assume the role he has never played. Although Rosie takes quickly to her father and his daughter Nicola, Hannah resists them both, afraid her father will leave again. Suddenly Hannah faces not only familial changes, but also emotional separation from her sister. In addition, she must confront her racial background, since before the return of her black father she has only known her white heritage.

Hannah’s story of growth and independence confronts many issues. As readers we experience the feelings of a twin sister’s separation and development into an adult; the difficulty of single-parent families; and the differences between white and black cultures. Although the book hinges on Hannah’s rough emotional journey, she does not reconcile with herself until the end—and it is a wavering reconciliation at that. This realism allows readers to identify with Hannah’s struggles, because the changes come slowly, just as in life. One example is the conflict between Hannah and her parents. Unlike many young adult novelists, Jacqueline Roy delineates the truthful ambiguity of parent-child relations—no glorious hero emerges. We see good and bad in both the parents and Hannah. This forces readers to reexamine their own child-parent relationships; many undoubtedly will also find good and bad on both sides.