Crenshaw

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**Review**

Being homeless is a bad dream for many, but for Jackson it’s a reality. After Jackson’s dad is diagnosed with a condition that keeps him from working, Jackson’s family is tight on money, short on food, and down on luck. Jackson wants his parents to give him the facts—he never much liked silly stories. So when his old imaginary friend shows up, Jackson wants nothing more than to get rid of him. Crenshaw is a giant cat who loves surfing, bubble baths, and purple jelly beans, and he’s not real. Jackson doesn’t believe in imaginary friends anymore, and just wants Crenshaw to leave him alone. But when the family is evicted from their apartment and are once again living out of their minivan, Jackson realizes that maybe he needs Crenshaw now more than ever. Crenshaw teaches Jackson that a little imagination can go a long way, and that if he can just believe in good things to come, then the hard things he and his family are experiencing now will be bearable. Jackson learns once more to believe in hope and just a little bit of magic—and in purple jelly beans.

Katherine Applegate has a way of taking hard subjects and making them manageable for young audiences. Much like her novel *The One and Only Ivan*, which deals with difficult topics like animal cruelty from the perspective of a friendly gorilla, Crenshaw jumps on the topic of homelessness from a perspective that kids can relate to. Jackson is a typical kid in a tough situation, and the story is written in his voice. Children will be able too see themselves in Jackson’s story as he deals with his situation the way a typical child would. This makes it easier for real kids in real, tough situations to see that no situation is hopeless and that they are never alone. For many kids, stories like Crenshaw may have the ability to help them cope when they feel stuck in an impossible situation. I was impressed as I read by the raw reality and bravery of Applegate’s storytelling, and believe that Crenshaw has the power to promote imagination and hope for young readers everywhere.