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## Review: Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus

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## *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus*

By Dusti Bowling

Sterling Children's Books, 2017

### DESCRIPTION:

Aven Green is adopted, but before that, Aven was born with no arms and given up for adoption. Since children, and sometimes adults, are childlike and are apt to ask piercing questions like, "What happened to your arms?" Aven has become the inveterate storyteller and just to make her story interesting, she has come up with some wild and woolly tales about the "loss" of her appendages. On the realistic side, however, her parents have required their daughter to be independent, and with that independence has come a measure of self-respect, creativity, and confidence that has gained her friendships among her peers. Then, at age thirteen, her family moves--not just across town--but to another state. Both mom and dad hold managerial positions at the Stagecoach Pass amusement park--that seems to be on its last wheels. At school, Aven chooses not to eat in the cafeteria, having to use her feet to feed herself, of course, and being with all new classmates. It is this desire to be away from embarrassment that brings her to the right places to meet two new friends, both boys: Conner, who has Tourette's syndrome and Zion, who is overweight. However, it is Aven who brings out the best in the two, and as sometimes happens with best friends, occasionally, the worst. When Aven and Conner find lots of old and interesting memorabilia in an old shed at the Stagecoach Pass, mystery enters the story, and as the two determine to solve it, they have no idea how Aven's life will be changed. This young teen is a brave girl who will live long in the hearts of all readers, differently-abled or not.

### CRITIQUE:

This title is an eye-opener for most readers. Although all humans have some kind of handicap, most are not as obvious nor as hopeless to change as being born without arms. Aven tells readers that there is no surgical procedure that will change her condition. So, she adjusts, sometimes jokes, sometimes sighs, but always rises back to the occasion--even going out for the soccer team, which she and her dad have spent time playing since she was in second grade. Aven goes with Conner to a support group for kids with Tourette's syndrome, or he would not have gone. She shows interest in Zion until his mother realizes that is what *she* should be doing. The support given to Aven by her adoptive mom and dad is a model for all parents. The only negative is the coarse language that, no doubt, is used by some teens, but it does nothing to lift readers to a higher literary plane. The ending note, however, is beautiful. A sequel, *Momentous Events in the Life of a Cactus*, follows as Aven moves on to high school.

### RELATED SUBJECTS:

Adoption, Boy-girl friendships, Counseling, Disabilities, Education, Faith, Father-daughter relationships, Humor, Imagination, Loneliness, Mother-daughter relationships, Moving, Mystery stories, Parent-child relationship, Peer relationships, Physical disabilities, School, Soccer, Special needs, Tourette's syndrome

CHARACTER THEMES:

Confidence, Coping, Courage, Diversity, Empathy, Encouragement, Endurance, Family love, Fear, Friendship, Independence, Initiative, Leadership, Optimism Perseverance, Resilience, Resolve, Respect, Self-respect, Sharing, Steadfastness, Survival (Emotional), Trust, Trustworthiness

AWARDS:

Beehive Book Award (UT), Best Children's Books of the Year (Bank Street), Best of the Best Books, Bluestem Award (IL), Colorado Children's Book Award, Cybils Award, Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, Grand Canyon Reader Award (AZ), Indian Paintbrush Book Award (WY), Keystone to Reading Book Award (PA), Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, Maine Student Book Award, Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, Nene Award (HI), Nevada Young Readers' Award, Pennsylvania Young Readers' Choice Award, Reading the West Book Award, Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, Rhode Island Middle School Book Award, South Carolina Junior Book Award, Southwest Book Awards, Virginia Readers' Choice Award, Volunteer State Book Award (TN), William Allen White Children's Book Award ((KS), Wisconsin Battle of the Books