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Review: Reaching for the Sun (Revised)

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Reaching for the Sun

By Tracie Vaughn Zimmer

Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2007

DESCRIPTION:

Although Josie Wyatt doesn't want her life to be defined by her cerebral palsy, her odd walk and slow speech separate her from the other middle schoolers. Josie is bright, but placement in special therapy, which is designed to help with her disabilities, serves to further isolate her from the other students who treat as if she is mentally handicapped. Her single mother, who is busy working and going to school, loves Josie, but does not have the time to truly listen to her needs and desires. Josie is aware of her limitations, but she also knows her strengths, and in the midst of all of her challenges, she finds solace with her grandmother who provides the anchor and encouragement the young girl needs. True friendship arrives when a geeky kid with social issues of his own moves into one of the houses built on land that used to belong to Josie's family. He is able to see her as a person, not as someone with a disability. When Josie's grandmother suffers a stroke, Josie is able to return the encouragement and support that her grandmother has always given her, and her strength really shines. Although life has not dealt with Josie fairly, she is determined to make her own way and to become all that she can be with dignity and pride.

CRITIQUE:

Told in free verse, this moving story captures the heart of a young girl longing to be known and appreciated for who she is, not for her disability. Readers who have been marginalized for any reason should be able to identify easily with Josie. Others are shown what it means to live with such a visible handicap. Along with dealing with cerebral palsy, Zimmer treats the issues of friendship, family relationships, illness and other life struggles. Her descriptive passages are vivid and beautiful. The simplicity of text and the short chapters make the book appealing even to reluctant readers. This is an excellent title to use with units on free verse and journal writing.

RELATED SUBJECTS:

Cerebral Palsy, Cross-generational relationships, Family love, Fairness, Friendship, Grandparents, Handicaps, Mother-daughter relationships, Peer-relationships, Physical disabilities, School

CHARACTER THEMES:

Coping, Courage, Fairness, Independence, Resolve, Respect, Self-acceptance, Spunk

AWARDS:

Best Children's Book of the Year (Bank Street), Cybils Award, Maine Student Book Award, Notable Books, Schneider Family Book Award, Teachers' Choices, Young Hoosier Book Award (IN)