



If This Were a Story

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In the tradition of *Crenshaw* and *The Thing About Jellyfish*, ten-year-old Hannah copes with the bullies at school and troubles at home through the power of stories in this sweet and sincere debut.

Tenacious. That means strong-willed. My mother calls me that.

I wish I felt the same way.

If this were a story, I would discover I was a direct descendent of a famous soldier who won countless battles and protected hundreds of people. This resilience running through my veins wouldn't be damaged by the notes; it would fight off bullies and prevent my parents from yelling at each other.

But this is not a story. This is real life. My life as ten-year-old Hannah Geller, who is the only girl in fifth grade to have little red bumps on her face, is unable to let the sad thoughts escape her mind, and leaves heads-up pennies wherever she can to spread good luck.

And who also finds magic in the most unlikely of places.

If This Were a Story Details

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From Reader Review If This Were a Story for online ebook

Jeanie {coffee girl} says

In the book, *If This Were a Story* Beth Turley shares about a ten year old girl named Hannah. Hannah is your typical fifth grade girl who attends school and keeps a reflective outlook on her day to day life. Written in short subject based chapters that could be easily read one at a time or several in one sitting based on the time the reader had. I believe these subjects are relevant to the fourth or fifth grade student: bullying, friendships, recess happenings, and family life at home.

One of the repetitive subject chapters are notes from visits of Hannah and her classmates have with their counselor. I think these are realistic issues that could be discussed between a student and a counselor or other trusted adult.

In addition, there is a story inside the story between the relationship of Hannah and her eighth grade pen pal Ashley. This consistent communication between the girls, assists with the main issues within the plot and assists Hannah with processing her thoughts.

From the publisher: Tenacious. That means strong-willed. My mother calls me that. I wish I felt the same way. If this were a story, I would discover I was a direct descendent of a famous soldier who won countless battles and protected hundreds of people. This resilience running through my veins wouldn't be damaged by the notes; it would fight off bullies and prevent my parents from yelling at each other. But this is not a story. This is real life. My life as ten-year-old Hannah Geller, who is the only girl in fifth grade to have little red bumps on her face, is unable to let the sad thoughts escape her mind, and leaves heads-up pennies wherever she can to spread good luck. And who also finds magic in the most unlikely of places.

Beth Turley is a graduate of the MFA in creative and professional writing program at Western Connecticut State University. She lives in southeastern Connecticut and teaches writing as an adjunct. *If This Were a Story* is her first novel. I received an Advanced Digital Reader Copy of this book from Netgalley and Simon & Schuster in exchange for my honest review. Book release of *If This Were a Story*, tomorrow August 28, 2018.

Sarah says

I'm not sure what I think about this book. The central character, Hannah, is certainly likable; sweet and earnest. Author Beth Turley does a good job of describing the sometimes tumultuous feelings sensitive children have, particularly in regards to the ever changing dynamics of peer relationships. Hannah often escapes into a fantasy world, imagining inanimate objects come to life. She explores her feelings via dialogue with these objects and imagines their responses. In the meantime, Hannah has repeated sessions with the school counselor discussing the bullying at school and her home life. The general mood of the book is sad. And therein lies the problem. Whilst this is a well written novel, I am afraid many of the book's target audience would simply find it too depressing. Furthermore, it might be confusing trying to differentiate actual events from the imagined interactions with inanimate objects. Although that may be the point, because Hannah herself sometimes has trouble distinguishing real from imaginary, I'm not sure that will be evident to young readers.

I do think this book might be a valuable read for teachers, parents, and counselors but I don't know they will come across it or think to pick up a book aimed at children aged 9 -12. Which really is a shame because Turley definitely has writing chops and I always like to champion debut authors.

Christina says

If This Were a Story follows word- and story-loving Hannah Geller through the first leg of her fifth-grade year as she grapples with a tumultuous home life and anonymously written notes at school stating that “nobody [likes her].”

Unfortunately, throughout the novel, author Beth Turley exploits multiple tropes: Hannah’s best friend Courtney serves as her far more stereotypically feminine, and thus, far less empathetic foil. Ryan is Hannah’s Black/brown best friend who, despite having unemployed parents and tattered shoes, is, inexplicably, all smiles all the time. Kimmy is the unhygienic, too-big-for-her-age class bully who lives in a trailer with her grandmother after her mother’s death.

In a novel whose purpose is to tackle the difficulties of dealing with family conflict and bullying as a child, it seems odd to follow a character for whom the world freezes upon the revelation of two (albeit, cruel) notes. The crusade to reveal the notes’ author is spearheaded by her parents, teacher, school counselor, and, eventually, a local police officer. Like many of her peers, Hannah is subjected to bullying. However, Hannah has something her classmates don’t: a dedicated team of concerned, authoritative figures who will not rest until they see justice done by her. (At one point, Hannah notes that Ryan is subjected to different treatment for his brownness; I couldn’t help but wonder whether a cop had ever been brought in to chastise the students in his defense.)

The advent of #MeToo was harshly criticized for its amplification of exceptional white girls and women. In 2018 and beyond, then, how relatable is a children’s novel about an intellectually gifted white girl—whose excellence is buttressed by surrounding marginalized characters, no less—to youth who don’t fit Hannah’s profile?

For ages 8-12.

Rebecca says

This is a beautifully written story that really makes you think.

Ten year old Hannah is in her final year of elementary school. She is dealing with some emotionally challenging events in the best way she knows how. But the question has to be asked ‘Are her coping mechanisms really helping her?’

I found the book a real challenge to read- I became overwhelmed with emotion and so many times wanted to walk away and not return. The sadness was almost unbearable. Which makes me wonder - would an 8 -12 year old really read this book? I am not sure. It may be a more suitable book for an older audience.

Ruthie says

I honestly hope there are not as many kids out there experiencing these kinds of issues, but it is a complicated world these days and what a blessing that kids have an opportunity to read and understand through a story what is happening to them and other kids around them. I was totally engrossed in the story and think that it will help some kids who read it get in touch with their own feelings. Hopefully they will also

be able to reach out for help to someone that will encourage them to express feelings that are locked up inside them.

Laura Gardner says

This is a heavy, sad book that I think will struggle to find an audience. The writing is lovely, but Hannah's experience is overwhelmingly depressing. It wasn't easy to read. In addition, the chapters that are told from Ambrose the elephant's point of view are clever, but I suspect elementary readers will be confused by the switch in perspectives. It's also unclear whether the objects have voices due to magic, mental illness or something else. This book is being compared to Crenshaw by Katherine Applegate, which I think is apt, but it lacks the charm and whimsy of the large cat in Crenshaw.

Rebecca says

Heartwarming story of a young girl who continues to try to find her place in her school and wants to please her parents at home. If she can do these things, she can possibly have her parents get along and school will be easier to get through. Hannah was a character that all adults can identify with and an easy one for any child who's ever been bullied can identify with. As the story unfolds, Hannah is left with some options to help things improve but just how far will she go to get what she wants?

Erin Cashman says

What a beautifully written, poignant book. I loved Hannah, who is struggling to find her place in school and with her friends, especially when she finds a note saying no one likes her. The book deals with a lot of issues that young readers also deal with: bullying, friendship, self-esteem, loyalty, stress at home. Yet the book isn't heavy, rather it's hopeful. And Hannah ends up being a lot stronger and more resilient than she realized. A must for all middle grade collections!

Allison Volz says

First, I have to say (without giving anything away) that love when an author is able to surprise me, especially when I am reading middle grade books! If I was surprised, most likely my students will be too, and with this book it will be pretty unexpected. This is a beautiful book about the struggles to fit in and hide what you're dealing with outside of school. I also enjoyed the way the book is crafted - the short chapters will appeal to my young readers. I also liked how approachable for middle grade readers the use of offering another perspective (the guidance counselor) is in terms of structure.

Bonnie Grover says

Thank you to @bethturley for sharing this beautiful story with me. "Bullying hurts as hard a punch in the face, even if it doesn't touch you." This is a very real story for so many of our students. There are many

layers to this story and I think many students will find themselves in this story. Hannah is a 5th grader who is unable to let sad thoughts escape her mind, and leaves heads-up pennies to spread good luck. Somehow she needs to find a little of that magic for herself. I'm sure it will be a popular choice among my students.

Joanne Kelleher says

Hannah is a sad little girl. She has one questionable friend, one good friend, and one imaginary friend, but she is not a friend to herself. I couldn't figure out exactly what was wrong with her. Was she too gifted/introspective/analytical/sensitive/sad for the world? Was it Riley? Her parents? Everything? Was it vague on purpose? At any rate, the overall tone of the book was sad. It felt heavy to read, heavy to be Hannah.

The line "If this were a story" was repeated throughout the book, whenever Hannah wished her life could be different. Hannah imagined alternate events that included elements of fantasy. Inanimate objects spoke to her, blurring the line between her stories and her real life.

The "if this were a story" line was also used by Hannah to analyze the structure of the story of her life using Freytag's Pyramid. For example, she said, "If this were a story, this would be the inciting incident," or the turning point, or the emotional point of the book. I know Hannah is supposed to be gifted, but this was too "meta" for me.

On a positive note, it was a quick read, there were a few sweet moments, and the ending was hopeful. Also, I love when school personnel are portrayed in a positive way in books, so I appreciated the patience, kindness, and understanding shown by Hannah's guidance counselor.

girlsreadtheworld says

It is beautifully written, covers important topics, it's timely, relatable, and I actually think it's destined to become a classic. As I was reading this, I found myself analyzing the story, the text. I loved the way it was written with so many layers and so much meaning in each character and each paragraph. Maybe that's why I can see it as a classic - I can totally see kids studying it in school.

Hannah is dealing with bullies - both named and anonymous - and her parents won't stop fighting at home. Oh, and inanimate objects around her, like her stuffed Elephant Ambrose, have come to life and are talking to her - Ambrose actually narrates parts of the story. (I've heard ITWAS compared to Crenshaw and The Thing About Jellyfish, but I haven't read either, so take that for what it's worth). It's a really sweet and beautifully crafted novel about the power of a story and an ultimately pretty strong little girl. Hannah's character is one that will really resonate with kids, regardless of their experience. I'd say this is a must-have for any middle grader's shelf.

Colby Sharp says

Loved this one!

Adding it to my list of awesome 2018 books.

<https://www.mrcolbysharp.com/2018/>

Deidre Scott says

This is a very true to times, realistic fiction book. Dealing with bullies and parents fighting is something that many kids face today. This book shows quirky 5th grade girl who copes with her issues using her imagination. I wish there were more books that had mature subjects in them for Juvenile ages. There is no age limit for mature subjects in the real world, so there shouldn't be an age limit for mature subjects in the books that they read.

Diane says

"I wish I were in a story. Then I could rewrite things to end the way I want them to and erase all the bad parts."**

Hannah is a very unusual girl. She loves words, but she has a hard time talking to others about her troubles. "It's easier to store words up like emergency supplies than open my mouth and use them." Even her meetings with Ms. Meghan, the school counselor, don't seem to get her to talk much. She does, however, have conversations with Ambrose, her stuffed elephant, who seems to understand Hannah better than her friends. In addition, the world seems to have plenty of advice for Hannah, as well. "If I listen hard enough, the world speaks to me.

The trouble begins when Hannah finds a note on the classroom floor that says *Nobody likes Hannah*. Who would write such a hurtful note? Is it Kimmy? Kimmy seems to emit *hate rays* toward most of her classmates and is often seen as a bully. Or is it Courtney, who has been acting strangely lately? She's one of Hannah's friends, but sometimes isn't that nice to Hannah. "When her mean side comes out, I don't feel lucky at all." Luckily, her other friend, Ryan, is far more faithful.

Mrs. Bloom, classroom teacher, and Ms. Meghan jump into action, trying to find who wrote the note as well as creating activities to curb the bullying. But despite their efforts, a second note appears that says *Why would anyone be friends with Hannah?* But no matter what they try or who they involve (parents and even a police officer), the notewriter does not emerge.

The only human Hannah seems to be able to talk to about all this is her 8th grade pen pal, Ashley. It seems safer to write about it, than to talk about it. And as Hannah continues to observe the world around her, trying to find answers, she notices that "Everyone's hurting from something."

Such an interesting story about a very complex, highly intelligent girl. Her insight and empathy toward others is special as she tries to understand the perspectives of others and why they act the way they do. "Maybe Violet Beauregarde had a hard time at school. Maybe Mike Teavee's dad was never home. We only see what people want us to see. We are all unreliable narrators." The gradual release of information about Hannah through the counselor's session notes, her letters to Ashley and her conversations with Ambrose slowly build to total picture of Hannah that she is not ready to admit herself. I also love to voice of Ryan, who is a true friend whose not afraid to tell it like it is. "That's messed up. You don't get to put someone down to make yourself feel better." Great writing. A definite addition to my school library.

****Quotes taken from an Advanced Reader Copy**
