



The Boy with 17 Senses

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Every resident of the planet Yipsmix has synesthesia—they don't just hear sounds; they see and taste them, too. On this unusual planet, poor Jaq Rollop must save his family's farm. To do so, Jaq is forced to sell his beloved pet and only friend. Trusting and naive, Jaq gets swindled into trading his pet for a seemingly worthless key. But then something very strange happens. The key leads Jaq through a wormhole to a terrifying and magical land full of riches, overwhelming sensations, and giants. The name of this frightening land? Earth.

The Boy with 17 Senses Details

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Author : Sheila Grau

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Gordon Jack says

I loved reading Sheila Grau's modern take on the Jack and the Beanstalk story. Jaq Rollop is a kind and naïve boy doing everything he can to save his family's farm on the distant planet of Yipsmix. When things get so bad he must trade his beloved pet for a mysterious key, he sets off on an adventure that brings him to earth, where he meets giants (us) and finds hidden treasure (chewed gum stuck to the bottoms of tables). Now he must get these riches back to Yipsmix and save his family.

Part of what I loved most about his book is how Grau helps the reader experience synesthesia, a fascinating condition in which one of our five senses activates another. So, numbers have distinct smells, letters and words have distinct colors and tastes. This made the experience of reading the story so much more engaging as it introduced me to a whole new way of experiencing the world.

My favorite aspect of Grau's books, however, is how they celebrate goodness with humor. Like in her great Dr. Critchlore series, Grau shows us a boy struggling to stay kind and honest in a world where everyone is driven to succeed at all costs. Without ever moralizing or preaching, Grau shows young readers how you don't have to be selfish or have superpowers to be successful. In this way, she reminds me of the great Roald Dahl, who showed us that being good and honest brings its own rewards.

Laura says

Cute overall, with a hint of otherworldliness: the world Jaq inhabits has synesthesia, but that's the norm. So of course Earth will feel weird to him. What will make Jaz feel familiar to readers is his being such a sad sack - bullied, at risk of losing his home and his friend (a whippet) - and his attempts to overcome all that. Even those who don't like fractured fairy tales will enjoy this; for me, it's what lifted the book from a two to three star.

ARC provided by publisher.

Kim Paige says

Fun read. Sci-fi with synesthesia attributes and how to be a good friend thrown in for good measure. Describing how one can hear colors and taste words is not an easy task but Grau makes it fun and relatable for the reader.

Malia says

I received a copy of this book from a goodreads giveaway. This book was a fun and light hearted upgrade to Jack and the Beanstalk. I really enjoyed the quirks of the planet and Jaq himself. There is quite a bit of conceptual complexity that I anticipate would be challenging for younger readers. I could definitely see this story making a great picture book with synesthesia showing how everything interacts with Jaq.

Eva says

I would rate “The Boy with 17 Senses” book a 4 out of 5 because it was an extremely interesting book with a very different take on life. In the book, a citizen on the planet Yipsmix finds a portal to the planet Earth. There, people are very big, scary, and most often, mean. He saves a friend while there, and in saving that person he also mends a friendship. This book really opened up to me how often we misunderstand each other. It was a very interesting book, but it was not the best book I ever read, which is why I only rate it a 4 out of 5 and not a 5 out of 5.

Roisin says

Jack and the Beanstalk with a twist! This book was highly entertaining and I really enjoyed the style of writing and the creativity involved in this book. Once I had finished, I really had connected with the characters by experiencing all of their hardships and fun times. I would definitely recommend this book!

Daline says

On the planet of Yipsmix, the residents can taste words, emotions have color and shape and numbers have distinct personalities. Young Jaq Rollop and his family are struggling. The boy next door and his grandfather are trying to take everything they own because of a family grudge. Jaq is forced to sell his beloved pet to stop the family from starving. Only he is tricked into trading his pet for an old worthless key. However, the key may not be worthless. It has a hidden compartment which contains a hidden map, which sends Jaq through a wormhole to a terrifying land of giants. The frightening land has overwhelming sensations and giants. The land also holds is full of riches which could solve his problems if Jaq is brave enough to face the land of Earth.

Grant says

This is a pretty basic Jack and the beanstalk retelling. But it has a few issues. First, the overall tone of the prose has that syrupy quality adults adopt when they are talking down to children. I never enjoyed that as a child, and I still don't. Second, there were details that did not further the plot, add richness, or affect the story in any way, except to slow it down. Why do I care if there is some tradition on a world that this story does not take place on? Third, there are several plot points that simply do not make sense, even in context.

Sarah says

Jaq's family are dirt-poor farmers on the planet Yipsmix, where everyone hears colors and tastes words. His only joy is his pet freasel, but he is forced to sell his beloved Klingdux to avoid starvation. However, on his way to the market a conman tricks him into trading Klingdux for a worthless key. All is not lost: the key

contains a map to a wormhole that leads to a world covered in the priceless glug (i.e. chewing gum). The name of that planet? Earth. A sprightly retelling of the old tale where Jaq must contend with bullies and sensory overload in addition to the traditional giants.

Britt says

This was extremely clever - Sheila Grau knows what she's about (Her first Critchlore book was my favorite MG read of 2015).

It took me about 50 pages to figure out, but this is a super witty retelling of Jack and the Beanstalk (which explains the weird quote about beanstalks on the cover - I was initially confused). Jaq is a resident of the planet Yipsmix, fortunately named because the letter "x" apparently tastes delicious. See, on Yipsmix, numbers have colors and produce feelings and letters and words can create tastes and visions. This leads to some pretty whimsical and adorable worldbuilding, and later, when Jaq travels to Earth, some fun commentary about the stimulations constantly present on Earth. Basically, this is a Jack and the Beanstalk retelling with a serious science fiction/satirical twist. The end result is an adorable little read (although the end dragged a bit) that I will be booktalking in the spring.

Oh, and Jaq has a cute animal sidekick, which I'm always a sucker for.

It wasn't earth shattering or anything, but it was quite cute. 3 stars - I liked it.

Katniss Rylee says

This book caught my eye in the National Library Board. I read the summary on the back page and thought, "I'll try." And guess what... I was right about it. In fact I think I kind of underestimated it at first glance. Definitely suitable for children aged 9-12 as contents are appropriate. Author Sheila Grau, obviously, had put a lot of thinking to this book in terms of generating ideas!

Martha says

Can you imagine having 17 senses? Focusing with any one of them would be difficult. This is the problem that Jaq suffers every day. Living on another planet, Yipsmix everyone has synesthesia, a condition where one of their 17 senses stimulates another, they hear sounds and see colors or taste words, etc.. Jaq doesn't just suffer from over stimulation, he's bullied unmercifully by his neighbor, his mother makes him constantly work and attacking nipping wippers (small animals that look like balls of fur), make his farm work painful. When his families' future is threatened, Jaq secretly passes through a portal that places him on Earth. The people are giants there, he discovers another Yipsmix being from his planet there as well, but communication with him is prevented by evil humans. The tension increases and with each trip through the portal, Jaq's chances for survival become more tenuous. This is a fractured fairy tale about bravery and sticking to your own beliefs. The ending is full of great adventure, but the constant bullying and preachy messages are heavy handed. Jaq has so many obstacles to conquer that it becomes repetitive. More success sprinkled among his struggles would make the story more enticing.

Tracy Smith says

A fresh twist on Jack and the beanstalk with secret messages and wormholes. This contained some good points such as the truth that courage comes from caring about something more than yourself, but the alternate world was somewhat irritating and too cutesy to me.

Samantha says

Eh. It's an interesting play on Jack and the Beanstalk, but it's not my favorite book.

Jasmine says

It's a jack and the beanstalk retelling! And it's fun! Reallly made to be read aloud, I think.
