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# Strong Deaf



## Synopsis

Jade is the only hearing member in her family. Her older sister gets to go to the school for the deaf headed by her grandfather Gilbert, but Jade feels left out. Marla thinks her little sister is a pest and a brat. When they end up on the same softball team for the summer, neither is happy about it. Jade, the smallest player on the team, is assigned to be the catcher. It looks like it's going to be a long season. As sisters, they are often at loggerheads, but as team mates Jade and Marla have to find ways to get along. In spite of their differences, they soon discover that each has a lot to offer the other.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8-Twelve-year-old Jade is hearing; her fourteen-year-old sister, Marla, like much of their family, is deaf. Tensions mount between the sisters when they play on the same summer softball team. Set against the 2006 Gallaudet University student/alumni protests, the story gets a lot right: Jade's experience as a hearing child in a deaf family; Marla's defensive adolescent arrogance; the oppressive assumptions of hearing people the family encounters; the empowering values of Deaf Culture as depicted through successful Deaf adults with typical expectations of their children, whatever their hearing status. Unfortunately, the book's format may lead to misconceptions among readers not versed in American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf Culture; Jade's point of view appears in standard English, but Marla's point of view and signed communication are rendered in a stilted, present-tense-only patois that seems to be trying to approximate the order of ASL signing

but only makes the characters sound illiterate and unintelligent. Jade incorrectly describes her signing style as "Exact Signed English" (the actual term is "Signing Exact English") and her family's ASL as "sort of a sign language shortcut." While it is believable for a child her age to misunderstand that ASL is a real language with its own grammar and linguistic structure separate from English, the fact that her misperception is never corrected for readers, not even in an author's note, is inexcusable.-Kathleen Kelly MacMillan, Carroll County Public Library, MD (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Fourteen-year-old Marla has just returned home from her residential school for the deaf, and her younger sister, 12-year-old Jade, is already acting immature. Jade, who's been anxiously awaiting softball season, is crushed when she's forced to be a benchwarmer on Marla's team in case Marla needs an interpreter. Told from the perspectives of both Jade, in standard prose, and Marla, in translated American Sign Language, which uses many language shortcuts (e.g., "Weekend fun. Play many game"), this realistic story explores the dynamics of a family with both hearing and deaf members. McElfresh also tackles controversial issues in the deaf community: Jade, the only hearing member of the family, wonders how Marla's life would have been different with a cochlear implant, and their parents attend a Gallaudet University protest, which is based on an actual event. Just when the sisters' sibling rivalry comes to a head, their responses to an accident help them see each other's strengths. An enlightening book, no matter one's abilities. Grades 5-8. --Angela Leeper --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This was a short, simple book, but an important one. It is essentially a story of sibling rivalry, but what makes it fascinating is the relationship between the two girls. I've read a lot about Deaf history and Deaf culture, and there is a lot of talk about how it is for deaf kids to grow up in hearing households with varying levels of Sign fluency. This is the first book I've read / discussion I've seen about what it would be like for a hearing girl to grow up in a Deaf household. That part was fascinating. For example, Jade mentioned that though she had grown up immersed in Sign, she signed more like Signed English instead of with ASL grammar, and had a hard time keeping up with the shortcuts and slang that are constantly changing in the language. Theoretically, she's a native ASL speaker, and thus should be as aware of the placement differences between the signs for "lemon" and for "lunch" as her congenitally deaf older sister. But this is not the case. However, the author's website says that she has a deaf sister, and is thus probably quite involved in the Deaf

community, and knows about differing levels of ASL fluency. It was a surprise to me. Similarly, several people mentioned that they were thrown off in the beginning by Marla's chapters being written in ASL grammar instead of standard English grammar. I enjoyed it, because I could imagine some of the ASL signs that I knew. Now if only the book came with movie outtakes so that we could see some of the scenes playing out! Actually, this book would make a fantastic movie. For those who are perhaps not fascinated with the ins and outs of ASL linguistics, say, some of the young adults to whom it is marketed, it's a fun story that kids should be able to relate to and enjoy. It's a story (on both sisters' parts) of feeling like you don't belong, and that's something that all teenagers can relate to.

This book explores the relationship between a "strong deaf" teen (deaf from birth) - and her younger hearing sister. In a different twist than most expect, the hearing teen is the "oddity" in this family which consists of deaf parents, grandparents and other deaf relatives. The book is written from the viewpoint of Jade, the hearing sister, and Marla, the deaf sister. When the deaf teen speaks, it is in "deaf speak" a kind of shorthand/abbreviated sentence structure, which adds to the realistic element of this book. The story line is not only believable but shows the author's true understanding and knowledge of life with a hearing impaired sibling and the difficulties and frustrations that it brings. This is a great read for young people but also adults who might like something a little different in a quick read. Highly recommend this book !

Written from two stand-points, this book looks at the interaction between two sisters, one deaf and one hearing, in a "strong deaf" family. Being the only hearing child in a three generation family of deaf members creates many misunderstandings for both the child and for her parents and sister. The author weaves a compelling story and a view into the deaf community. I learned so much from this book.

This book was very educational in that both the hearing culture and the deaf culture view were easily understood. The writing style was clear and interesting.

Really enjoyed reading this book. Wish it was longer. I know the author personally and enjoy all of her books.

Strong Deaf is a unique experience in many ways. For one, the story is told from alternating

perspectives - between Jade and her older sister Marla. As Marla is deaf, her part of the story is told in ASL [American Sign Language] - which can be hard to adjust to when you're reading it and not seeing it. Once I got used to the style, I enjoyed it and it really helped me to see things from Marla's perspective. As a reader with some experience with ASL, I found myself imagining Marla sitting in front of me signing her side of the story. However, readers unfamiliar with ASL may have more difficulty adjusting enough to get into the story. What also adds to Strong Deaf's uniqueness is the fact that - whereas many stories about deaf children involve the deaf child living in a family of hearing - in this story, the hearing sister is actually the minority in her household. It was a nice change getting to see the hearing/deaf ratio essentially reversed, and seeing the deaf culture from a family so strongly involved in it. As for the content, the synopsis is not really an accurate summary of the book as the majority of the storyline and character development takes place off the softball field. Also, though both siblings had their life lessons to learn, I actually felt that Marla was more immature than her little sister - and downright condescending towards the hearing world, including those in her own family. Of course, as Marla points out, she's a teenager now, and so the extreme behavior Marla displayed could have been an intentional reflection of her age. Fortunately, the two girls have stable parents and an extended family to help guide the young girls through such an awkward time. That said, Strong Deaf is a story about young siblings learning how to relate to each other - though from an added extreme than most siblings find themselves - and with that, McElfresh crafted a fantastic story. Though revolving around deaf culture and the differences between the hearing and deaf, anyone with siblings close in age can relate to the story. Who doesn't remember the petty fights - arguing over chores, personal space, privacy, friendships - with their siblings? Readers can also relate to Jade's feeling of not knowing how to fit in - even among her own family. McElfresh's new book is a great recommendation for children and young adults. It's a pretty quick read that will hopefully leave the reader with new insights. Strong Deaf conveys a message that is much-needed among young siblings trying to move from rivalry to maturity.

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