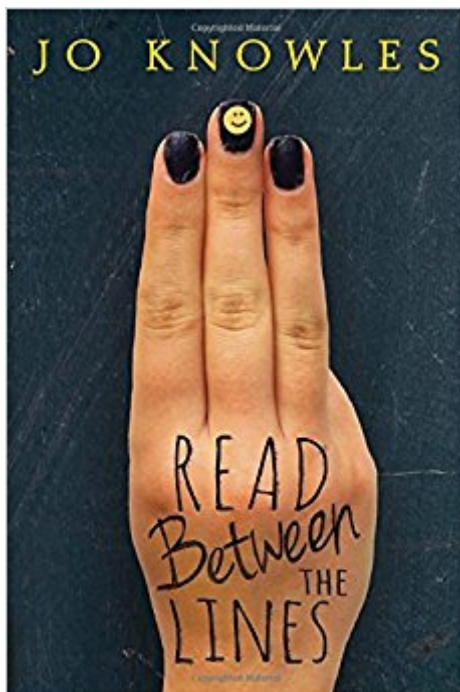


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Read Between The Lines



Synopsis

Does anyone ever see us for who we really are? Jo Knowles's revelatory novel of interlocking stories peers behind the scrim as it follows nine teens and one teacher through a seemingly ordinary day. Thanks to a bully in gym class, unpopular Nate suffers a broken finger—the middle one, splinted to flip off the world. It won't be the last time a middle finger is raised on this day. Dreamer Claire envisions herself sitting in an artsy café, filling a journal, but fate has other plans. One cheerleader dates a closeted basketball star; another questions just how, as a "big girl," she fits in. A group of boys scam drivers for beer money without remorse—or so it seems. Over the course of a single day, these voices and others speak loud and clear about the complex dance that is life in a small town. They resonate in a gritty and unflinching portrayal of a day like any other, with ordinary traumas, heartbreak, and revenge. But on any given day, the line where presentation and perception meet is a tenuous one, so hard to discern. Unless, of course, one looks a little closer—and reads between the lines.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up—Knowles's latest novel realistically depicts the intertwined lives of 12 individuals. From high school student to recently graduated new adult to teacher, these personal vignettes are achingly truthful and reveal the secrets and sorrows hidden behind everyday facades. As the stories unfold and the points of view begin to overlap, a complete picture begins to form. The message of the novel is divulged on the last page, bringing the book into tight focus and finally giving teens an

"aha" moment. The short story format could tempt reluctant readers, and many young adults will see shadows of themselves in the well-drawn characters. Hand this one to fans of dramatic realistic fiction and those who enjoy slice-of-life novels. — Heather Miller Cover, Homewood Public Library, AL

The book proceeds, each new character entering, with his/her realities, dreams and secrets becoming another masterfully woven thread. With emotional explorations and dialogue so authentic, one might think Knowles isn't creating but channeling the adolescent mind. A fascinating study of misperceptions, consequences and the teen condition. — Kirkus Reviews (starred review) Achingly truthful... The short story format could tempt reluctant readers, and many young adults will see shadows of themselves in the well-drawn characters. Hand this one to fans of dramatic realistic fiction and those who enjoy slice-of-life novels. — School Library Journal The idea of looking past an angry gesture to understand what led to it makes for an empathetic approach to understanding random hostility. Teens who read these stories will likely never see a raised middle finger again without wondering what the story is behind it — Publishers Weekly Each (story) can be read and appreciated in isolation, but readers will enjoy piecing together the stories and the accompanying relationships. — BookPage This is likely to speak to any teenager (or adult) in a stage of transition — Booklist The stories are all skillfully written ... may cause readers to think twice about the sentiment behind that sign. — Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books These interconnected stories create a powerful, complex whole. — The Horn Book

Our school is reading this book as an all-school read because of the book's powerful message: no one really knows what another person's life is all about, or the troubles they have had, so we should all try to "read between the lines" when trying to understand someone else. Every day we struggle to be understood and to understand others, and we all need to be compassionate and patient with each other. This is an especially relevant message for adolescents, who are quick to judge (and punish, bully or exclude) each other. There are many great topics for discussion here.

Both of my sons (12 and 10) are loving this book, and I'm loving it too. A great one to read aloud to teens and tweens and then discuss!

I loved the almost short story format. It was fun to read. I would read more by this author

Great Read!

Great vignettes about the complications of being a tween in this day and age.

I'll admit: I was halfway through the book when someone noticed me reading it and commented on the title, namely that it's an illusion to giving someone the middle finger. That gesture is a theme throughout the connected stories of the book, with each featuring a glimpse into the inner lives (and insecurities) of a young character in a suburb. The title is more than a reference to the gesture, though as each story invites you to read between the lines - look beyond the surface - of each of the youths and peer into their inner lives. What I liked about this book was how realistic the voices felt. No character was simple or triet; each was appropriately complex. I also liked that there was no happy ending to wrap all of the stories up. The book takes place over a single day, and while some characters have had revelations by the end of the day, others are just as unresolved as they started the day. The main thing I didn't like about the book was how the stories were connected. While I understand why the author focused on one town, and I liked seeing glimpses of the characters from other characters' points of view. That said, there were a few times when the stories came together in a way that was just a little too contrived, probably (understandably) forced slightly by the author so that she could keep the story to a single day.

I taught seventh grade for fourteen years. The cumulative files for students always included past school pictures. When kids were especially bratty, I looked in their files for those pictures. It helped to see that they were smaller humans once and most of them were shining little people. It helped me read between the lines and to keep the mental flipping off to a minimum and the physical flipping off to a never. Jo Knowles gets it. She gets that we categorize people. It's a survival skill; we determine who is safe and who is not, who is an ally and who is not, and who is a mate and who is not. Categorization is efficient and sensible. It's also unfair. Jo Knowles gets that. She also gets that unfair doesn't mean we should stop doing it. Her message is that we categorize and we will categorize but that looking into a person's life helps us see more than their category. Category is, after all, based on our perception of another. Anti-bullying curriculum is pretty standard in public schools these days. Whatever your opinion on it, the curriculum seems here to stay (the one I was required to teach was called "Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders" and it was tough to teach through the terribly fake characters in the curriculum vignettes). This book would be a good addition

(or substitution if you can get away with it) to an anti-bullying curriculum for eighth graders and up. Many eighth graders are fourteen and a few are fifteen. American society identifies sixteen as the age of being competent enough to operate the heavy flying chunks of metal, power, and glass we call cars. Eighth graders are pretty close to sixteen. It's a good idea to work on talking about anti-bullying and the connections between action and consequence and categorization and understanding. This book is a non-fake way to do that. Jo Knowles is writing about change and for most of her characters, the changes are positive and/or character building. That's the message I am taking from "Read Between the Lines:" when we change our categorizations and perceptions, we change too. Most of the time it's probably positive, and if it isn't, you can always look a little deeper and change again. If it's dangerous, we have enough to categorize it as dangerous and have one more asset in our survival skills. Reading between the lines is actually quite complicated in navigating our lives. Thank you to Jo Knowles for providing a guidebook. Note: I'd rate the book as PG-13 despite the whole middle finger thing. Jo Knowles doesn't hang her whole book on the shock value of the middle finger. Another Note: If you are new to teaching, read Ms. Lindsay's story slowly and carefully. It's an excellent picture of what first-year teaching looks like for most people. Be encouraged, it usually gets better. But don't be afraid to seek change if it doesn't.

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