

HRRB BOOK SUMMARIES

Hope Springs by Jaime Berry

Sixth grader Jubilee and her paternal grandmother, Nan, move so frequently from town to town that they have Relocation Rules. Jubilee's father died in a motorcycle accident when she was 4 and her mother took off to become a country singer. A great fan of the TV show *Queen of Neat*, hosted by Arletta Paisley, Jubilee loves crafting. After she and Nan arrive in Hope Springs, Texas, Jubilee befriends Abby, whose mother is the mayor. A job in a fabric store puts her organizational skills to great use, and the shop owner teaches her how to quilt. Jubilee is thrilled to learn that Arletta grew up in Hope Springs and will be coming to visit as the spokesperson for a new big-box store, but this leads to concerns about the survival of local businesses—and a glimpse for Jubilee of the person behind the TV personality. Another thread in the story is the strained relationship between Jubilee and her absent mother. Her friendship with Abby and her growing feelings for the townspeople lead Jubilee to question whether she can arrange her life as neatly as she can objects. With a town festival and occasional directions for craft projects thrown into the mix, debut author Berry allows Jubilee to grow and mature to the point where she can implement Staying Put Procedures. Quilting offers a perfect metaphor in this thoughtful tale of a tween piecing together a new life.

The lion of Mars by Jennifer Holm

In the year 2091, 11-year-old Bell leads a mundane life in America's small, underground settlement on Mars, along with a handful of adults and other orphaned children. He knows little of Earth and its various life-forms and cultures, a fact not helped by his home's self-imposed isolation from the nearby settlements of other nations, sparked by a mysterious incident, years before, that resulted in an American's death. Holm moves slowly in the first half, exploring Bell's quiet, day-to-day existence on the red planet as he worries over friendships, does chores, and begins to ask questions about his expanding awareness of the universe he inhabits. The excitement ratchets up when the children make an unauthorized excursion in a rover, curiosity driving them to peek in on neighboring settlements and voice growing doubts about their separation. The point comes to a head when a virus infects all of the American adults, forcing the kids to seek aid from their neighbors.

How to disappear completely by Ali Standish

When Emma discovers the first spot, “like a tiny bright moon” on her left foot, she’s sitting in church at the funeral of her grandmother, who had been her best friend as well. Soon other pale areas appear on Emma's face and hands. The diagnosis is vitiligo, a skin condition triggered by stress. When a classmate spreads a rumor that Emma has a highly contagious skin disease, she becomes a pariah, but Fina, a new friend, helps her through that painful period. Mysteriously, someone is continuing Gram’s tradition of leaving original enchanted-woodland fantasy narratives for Emma to continue writing. While trying to discover the person’s identity, she and Fina uncover surprising secrets from Gram’s past. In addition to creating a large, multigenerational cast of three-dimensional characters, Standish knits reality and imagination together seamlessly into an absorbing story of loss, identity, and human connections. Though Emma withdraws during her worst days, she reemerges as a stronger person who is capable of reaching out to others who are in pain. The fantasy narratives, written partly by Emma and partly by her mysterious “pen pal,” become a distinguishing feature of the book, separate from the main story, yet integral to it. A rewarding realistic novel, illuminated by magical elements.

Isaiah Dunn is my hero by Kelly Baptist

Isaiah Dunn needs a hustle like his best friend Sneaky’s candy business, something to get him, his mom, and his little sister out of the smoky motel where they’ve been living. Things have been tough since his dad died, and his mom has been drowning her sorrow in the bottle instead of working. He finds refuge in an old notebook where his dad had written a story casting Isaiah as a superhero. If only he was. Instead, his own words—the ones that used to flow into poems—are locked in his head, and his frustration over the current state of his life is bubbling over as aggression and getting him in trouble at school. Isaiah’s experiences as a 10-year-old Black child enrich the narrative, giving it an authenticity that will resonate with or stir empathy in readers. His struggles with grief and poverty are made surmountable by the strong, caring community around him. A school counselor, a librarian, former neighbors, the barber for whom Isaiah sweeps floors, and Isaiah’s friends all rally around him in a realistic and heartening show of support that helps him reclaim his voice and become the hero his family needs.

Measuring Up by Lily Lamotte

Newly transplanted to Seattle, 12-year-old Cici does her best to blend in at her new middle school, even though she misses her beloved A-má, her paternal grandmother who she left back in Taiwan. Cici is desperate to bring her grandmother to America for a visit, but how to pay for it? A local cooking contest with a \$1,000 grand prize might be the answer, but will her favorite Taiwanese dishes be enough to win over the judges? This sweet, family-oriented graphic novel celebrates cultural traditions and new beginnings in equal measure. Cici is good at making friends and adjusting to American culture, but she also celebrates her Taiwanese roots, finding joy and balance in both. First-time author LaMotte brings an obvious love of food and cooking to a positive story that aspiring young chefs will devour. Xu's manga-influenced full-color illustrations set a gentle tone to this highly appealing story of new beginnings.

Millionaires for the month by Stacy McAnulty

A reward of \$5,000,000 almost ruins everything for two seventh graders. On a class trip to New York City, Felix and Benji find a wallet belonging to social media billionaire Laura Friendly. Benji, a well-off, chaotic kid with learning disabilities, swipes \$20 from the wallet before they send it back to its owner. Felix, a poor, shy, rule-follower, reluctantly consents. So when Laura Friendly herself arrives to give them a reward for the returned wallet, she's annoyed. To teach her larcenous helpers a lesson, Laura offers them a deal: a \$20,000 college scholarship or slightly over \$5 million cash—but with strings attached. The boys must spend all the money in 30 days, with legal stipulations preventing them from giving anything away, investing, or telling anyone about it. The glorious windfall quickly grows to become a chore and then a torment as the boys appear increasingly selfish and irresponsible to the adults in their lives. They rent luxury cars, hire a (wonderful) philosophy undergrad as a chauffeur, take their families to Disney World, and spend thousands on in-app game purchases. Yet, surrounded by hedonistically described piles of loot and filthy lucre, the boys long for simpler fundamentals. The absorbing spending spree reads like a fun family film, gleefully stuffed with the very opulence it warns against.

Muffled by Jennifer Gennari

With the start of fifth grade comes new responsibilities for 10-year-old Amelia: she is allowed to walk to school and visit the Boston Public Library alone, but she also has to give up the noise-canceling headphones that she previously relied upon to manage her noise sensitivity. On the first day of school, Amelia's father, who has the same sensitivity, gives her a pair of fluffy purple earmuffs to ease the transition. Used in conjunction with the mental math she does as a coping mechanism, the earmuffs help to keep classroom and city noise at "five bars out of ten," but frustrate her mother and have an alienating effect in the classroom. As the class begins music lessons, Amelia struggles to settle on an instrument and retreats into the world of books until a solo library trip inspires her to pick up the trombone, and she embarks on a new friendship with fellow trombonist Madge. Gennari (*My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer*) effectively works Amelia's experience onto nearly every page ("each noise bounces around the walls of my head like a rubber ball"), making each of her hard-won victories resonate powerfully. A gentle portrait of a child learning to navigate her world.

Power Up by Sam Nisson

Miles and Rhys are friends, even though they haven't met and don't know each other's real-life identity. They play together as Gryphon and Backslash in *Mecha Melee*, an online game, and they are quickly becoming the best team around. But, their real lives are a bit more complicated—Rhys, aka Backslash, is the new kid at school, and Miles, aka Gryphon, is trying to determine who his real friends are. Unfortunately, Rhys also has to deal with Luke, the school bully; when Luke takes it too far, and Miles doesn't get involved, Rhys doesn't know who to trust. With *Battlecon* coming to town, will these two gamers realize a great friend is closer than they think? Bold, colorful artwork full of dynamic action and an inclusive cast of characters make this graphic novel a quick and engaging read. The two different illustration styles, representing the game as well as real life, fit well together and are easily distinguishable. A fun and heartening story that shows that a new best friend could be right around the corner.

Root magic by Eden Royce

It's the summer of 1963 when Gran dies, leaving 11-year-old Jezebel and her twin brother, Jay, to learn and master the family trade—working roots. A practice of healing, protecting, and conjuring magic, working roots holds deep ties to the Gullah Geechee people of South Carolina and their African ancestors, as well as to Jezebel's family and community. Despite her excitement around root work and the thought of protecting her family from the racist policeman terrorizing them, Jezebel knows that it'll only make her more of a target at school, unlike her popular brother. But soon, after a number of run-ins with mystical and spiritual beings, the family finds that the tween's inclination for root magic is stronger than they'd suspected, sparking a confidence and maturity in Jezebel that will resonate with anyone who has been teased for being different. This title adds nuance to textbook lessons about Jim Crow with rich histories and customs that predate slavery. All the while, themes of friendship and acceptance, family, and the very real pains of outgrowing childhood tether this title to the seams of the heart. Readers will revel in the magic of root work, but, perhaps more important, they'll develop a deep reverence for the practice as they come to understand its groundedness in healing, restoration, and respect for all beings.

Starfish by Lisa Fipps

Ellie is doing her best, but it never seems to be enough: not for her mom, who insists Ellie's weight is something to be fixed; not for her peers, who taunt her with unimaginably cruel words; and not even for herself. She doesn't mind being fat, but she does mind how she's treated for it. Now, as the threat of bariatric surgery grows, Ellie must find it within herself to stand up to the ones who pushed her to create the Fat Girl Rules—including herself. Fipps bursts onto the middle-grade scene with her debut, a verse novel that shines because of Ellie's keen and emotionally striking observations. As she draws readers in with her smart and succinct voice, Ellie navigates the difficult map of knowing she deserves better treatment while struggling with the conflict that's necessary to achieve it. Fipps hands her young narrator several difficult life lessons, including how to self-advocate, how not to internalize the words of others, and what it means to defend yourself. Ellie's story will delight readers who long to see an impassioned young woman seize an unapologetic victory.