

Real Friends

Shannon Hale

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Shannon is a spunky, creative girl with the biggest imagination. She loves to make up games and stories, and her random quirky personality sets her apart from the other girls. When she starts school, she quickly befriends Adrienne, who becomes her childhood best friend. But as they grow older, Adrienne's family comes and goes, and soon, Shannon finds herself meeting new people and navigating through the social struggles of fitting in. When she gets the chance to be part of "The Group" at her school, Shannon struggles with jealous bullies, social pressures, anxiety and more as side-effects of instant popularity. The graphic novel follows Shannon as she grows older through her elementary school years and navigates her way through the complicated world of friendships and self-confidence.

This book would be most appealing for readers around 7-12 years old. The characters are mainly elementary school students and the story is geared for younger audiences. However, I think it would still be greatly enjoyed by readers of all kind.

I really liked this book. The art was fantastic, and I loved the vibrant color work and design put into the flashback and daydreaming segments. I really liked the stylistic approaches of using symbolism throughout the novel to represent certain people or feelings. For example, Shannon's sister, Wendy, is drawn as a ferocious bear sometimes, but as the novel progresses, this visual representation of Wendy shifts as Shannon's relationship with her sister shifts. As a story, my biggest impression of the novel was that it felt genuine and real. The story is actually a little memoir by the author, Shannon Hale, so the events of the story are based off of her personal experiences. I liked that the book included many different spheres and angles of Shannon's life, such as her struggles at school, as well as her struggles at home, especially with her siblings.

Overall, the graphic novel was very nice and sweet. However, I felt that the resolution was a bit underdeveloped and fast-paced. Some somewhat significant events seemed to be only touched on briefly and lightly. Shannon's attitude as well as her relationships with others seemed to be resolved quite quickly at the end. As a reader, I felt like we were just beginning to understand the bigger picture behind the backstories and motives of other minor characters. I really wanted to learn more about certain characters and in a way, the ending felt a bit inconclusive and unexpected for me. The author did, however, make this the first novel of a series, so I believe the sequel will open up more answers and information to these questions.

As a whole, this novel is so relatable and real to me. It definitely brings back a lot of nostalgia of my own elementary school days and struggles. Learning to open up to people and sharing your insights with them is so wonderful and yet difficult sometimes. This would be a great book to help educate and comfort younger audiences struggling with their own friendships in the process of growing up.

Recommended Titles:

Best Friends by Shannon Hale

El Deafo by Cece Bell

Smile by Raine Telgemeier

Invisible Emmie by Terri Libenson

- The Babysitter's Club by Ann M. Martin