

When You Reach Me

Rebecca Stead

Reviewed by Sasha Legagneur, 17

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

www.bethestaryouare.org

A shoe, coat, and bag of bread- items that may seem simple to the common man, but play an essential role in Rebecca Stead's novel, *When You Reach Me*. This sci-fi/ mystery novel takes place between 1978-1979 and follows the life of Miranda Sinclair, a twelve year old girl living in the upper west side of Manhattan. Miranda lives with her single mother who has just been invited to compete on the game show *\$20,000 Pyramid*. Her best friend is Sal, a boy she has known since she was a small child. From nap time at school to the game they play with the poles on the bus, Sal and Miranda go through everything together. That is, until, the day Sal gets punched.

After Sal gets hit, a number of instances occur in Miranda's life that she has no explanation for. Not only must Miranda deal with her best friend avoiding her, but she must also pass the laughing man, an odd man who throws his fist into the air, kicks his legs into the street, and keeps his head underneath a mailbox. Most absurd of these all is the notes Miranda begins to receive. They appear in the most random places and seem to predict future events. Who is sending these notes? Why does the sender instruct Miranda to write a letter? Why did Sal stop talking to Miranda?

The John Newbery Medal is awarded to books that have made a distinguishable contribution to children's literature. 'Distinguishable' is the exact word I would use to describe this novel. *When You Reach Me* is one of my favorite books of all time, one reason being that I have never read something quite like this. I first crossed paths with this book in elementary school. Although I remember it being wonderful, I could not recall exactly what elements made it so amazing, but it is a novel I never forgot about. When I re-read this book recently, the elements that made this novel so brilliant and unique came rushing back to me.

One of the most amazing parts about *When You Reach Me* is that the story is effortlessly captivating. The execution is stunning. The author uses direct language to explain the events of the novel. Besides the mystery, everything that happens is clear as day. Readers can spend time focusing on the mystery without being confused by outside events. The complexity, thought, and meaning of the novel are revealed in the most subtle ways, one example being when Marcus and Miranda discuss the concept of time travel in *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Truthfully, I have nothing negative to say about this novel. The only aspect I would warn readers of is that the concept of time travel may seem confusing. After re-reading this novel, I spent hours looking up explanations behind certain events in the story. This, however, is what makes this novel brilliant. The story is so simple, yet so intricate that readers want to turn to the next page. If you are anything like me, you will enjoy the hours spent reading explanations of this novel because you want to capture its excellence.

Although fictional, *When You Reach Me* explores real life events. As a New York native, Stead is able to utilize this unique setting in her novel. She takes a subtle approach when addressing the idea that not every part of New York is as bright and shining as Times Square. There are racists, people dealing with mental disease, and folks who are truly struggling to make it.

Personally, I would recommend this novel to readers who are 13 years and older. Although this novel was placed in the children's department when I was younger, it has now been moved to the young adult section in many libraries. Although I feel like this novel could be picked up at the library, I believe it would be better suited as a gift. I can see some readers enjoying this novel so much that they would enjoy a personal copy of it.

Recommended Titles:

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'engle

The Higher Power of Lucky by Susan Patron

Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli.