Sink or Swim: A Novel of WWII
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The United States is at war with Japan and Germany, resulting from the turn of events from World War II. Twelve-year-old Colton decides to spend his remaining time with his brother, Danny, who is soon going to be deported to fight in the war, by going on a fishing trip off of the North Carolina Coast in two separate boats, since their father had passed away. Colton explains how he and Danny used to be the best of friends, but ever since their father had died, Danny had taken that as a sign to be the man of the house and they grew more and more distant. Suddenly, something pulls at the fishnet. It turns out to be a German U-boat, and Danny and his boat have disappeared. When Colton sees Danny's boat hanging off of the U-boat, he realizes that Danny was dragged underwater by it. The men on the submarine see him and seem to be laughing at him, but they were otherwise apathetic. Colton finds Danny, who doesn't respond when he calls his name, and is unconscious. Danny is later said to not be in a coma by the doctor, but Colton can tell that he was lying. Without Danny's money from fishing, and the hospital bills, Colton and his mom are in a tight spot. As more and more U-boats surface in the following days, Colton realizes how fatal the war really is. Since Danny was due to be deported and Colton was tall for his age, Colton discovers Danny's identification papers that were supposed to get him into the army, and he runs away from home with them, set on a journey to masquerade as his brother and fight in the army as a twelve-year-old, and he becomes a sub chaser, someone who deals with U-boats in the army, to avenge his brother.

There is a vast expanse of juvenile novels about World War II, but this one stands out on its own, from the unique point of view of a non-Jewish American boy fighting in the obscure Battle for the Atlantic. The horrors of World War II are shown in a way understandable to children, and Colton's story is enthrallingly interesting and original. One main thing I thought was great about this novel was how unique and historically accurate the plot was, because the majority of WWII novels are from the point of view of a European, Jewish or German, and even if it does portray an American, it revolves around Japan's impact on the U.S. The harsh realities of being in the army are portrayed through the eyes of a twelve-year-old. The writing is delightfully conversational, and Danny and Colton's sibling relationship preceding and succeeding their father's death can really cause some people to relate to Colton. The writing style is delightfully short and sweet, charmingly using affectionate slang and wit. One thing that I disliked about this novel was the characters. They lacked depth, dimension, and most importantly, personality. There are multiple major character deaths, but save for Danny's coma, there's no buildup or anything about the character which makes the reader feel sad about this character's death, it just portrays Colton's sad emotions. I feel like Watkins could have done a better job making us feel the feelings that Colton does by making the character likable, and showing how much this character meant to Colton like he did with Danny.

I would recommend this book to ages 10-12, because there is war violence and major character injuries/deaths. *Sink or Swim: A Novel of WWII*, is a charming nautical fiction book about a twelve-year-old's journey in the intimidating clutches of war and death.

Recommended Titles:

The Enemy Above: A Novel of World War II by Michael P. Spradlin
Code of Honor by Alan Gratz
Stolen Girl by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch