

Guts

Raina Telgemeier

Reviewed by: Anika, 13

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After one particular episode of vomiting, the protagonist finds herself having an indescribable feeling at just the thought of her, or someone else, being sick. In the third book of her autobiographical series, Raina Telgemeier details the anxiety and stress that were tied to her childhood fear. The story begins with Raina staying home from school due to frequent stomachaches. However, out of fear of getting sick or throwing up, Raina begins to worry about sharing food or eating certain types of dishes. Her parents get the sense that something is wrong after Raina begins missing too many days of school. In an effort to help her, Raina's parents take her to a therapist (Laura). Despite having several thoughts and emotions, Raina struggles with expressing her worries to Laura. However, at school, Raina finds herself regularly panicking about the possibility of getting sick. Furthermore, other students in her class tease Raina and make fun of her without knowing what she is going through. The fear of food poisoning coupled with school drama seems to just add to Raina's stress. Overtime, Raina begins to open up to Laura about the struggles in her life. In turn, Laura teaches Raina different ways to cope with her stress and fear. Near the end of the story, Raina even shares one of her coping mechanisms with the rest of her class.

The book *Guts* shines a light on Raina's personal issues with anxiety. The popular adage "A picture is worth a thousand words" could not be more fitting for this narrative. Rather than the words, the story is predominantly told by the amazing illustrations. Instead of *describing* what anxiety looks like, the novel *shows* what anxiety looks like. I think the accurate and illustrative explanations of serious real-world issues allows the message of the book to resonate with readers, especially those who are younger. Furthermore, the book helps to normalize open discussion of mental health problems and going to therapy.

Stress and anxiety are things that many people grapple with in different forms and to different degrees. It is important for young children to be able to put a label on the feelings that accompany such emotions and to understand that it is okay to have help when dealing with such issues. *Guts* helps to teach these lessons in a pictorial and accessible way intended for young minds. Given the central idea of the book, *Guts* discusses the themes of anxiety, mental health issues, therapy, and includes regular mentions of vomiting (although they are not too graphic). Along the same lines, as the novel is a coming of age story, the book does include references to puberty and girls getting their periods. Overall, this book is a powerful way of helping and teaching children about mental health issues. This graphic novel would make a great gift for children ages 9 and above.

Recommended Titles:

Smile, by Raina Telgemeier

Sisters, by Raina Telgemeier

Each Tiny Spark, by Pablo Cartaya

Nest, Esther Ehrlich

The Science of Breakable Things, Tae Keller