

***The Shifter* (Healing Wars #1)**

Janice Hardy

Reviewed by: Sophia Cheng, Age 15

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

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Fifteen-year old Nya is a Taker, or more specifically a Shifter, which means that she has the uncanny ability to draw pain from a person and transfer it to someone else. Unfortunately, she is unable to empty the pain into pynvium, which makes her ineligible to be a Healer in the Healer's League. It is the only opportunity for a Gevegian like her to rise above the poverty her people have been subjected to under the oppressive rule of the Duke of Baseer. Revealing herself as a Shifter would not be an option for Nya either, unless she was interested in becoming the Duke's new assassin. However, when Nya accidentally shifts pain to escape the wrath of a furious chicken farmer, the myth of the existence of a Shifter transforms into a rumor, and all too soon, her shifting powers are sought after. Then, apprentices within the League start to disappear, including her sister Tali, and Nya takes it upon herself to rescue her. As Nya uncovers the horrifying story hidden behind placating lies, she must learn to accept her power and make choices that determine who lives and who dies.

The Shifter by Janice Hardy contains all the components of an enchanting fantasy book with a touch of adventure, mystery, and humor. The story had an intriguing plot that is continually being built up with something being added every few pages to keep the reader on their toes. Nya's tenacious and spunky, yet altruistic character is really what makes the story so enjoyable to read. Narrated from her point of view, Nya contrasting sides combined with the occasional recollection of her past life creates a dynamic character that not only moves the story along, but also makes the plot unique. There is also a diverse group of supporting characters, but most of their stories are already intertwined with the main plot instead of being drawn into it as the story progresses. Furthermore, the villains have bland, predictable personalities that are all similar to one another, which detracts from the overall quality of the story. However, *The Shifter* does set a strong framework for a series, as the ending hints of a larger, more intricate plot, with an even more impressive storyline to come.

Recommended Titles

I would recommend *The Shifter* to middle school students since although the plot is quite complex and lengthy, it will not confound younger readers with the weightier topics used. Moreover, its suspenseful plot and vibrant characters will be sure to capture the attention of anyone looking for a delightful fantasy book. Other fantasy books that are similar to *Shifter* include *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, *Hidden Talents* by David Lubar, *Messenger* by Lois Lowry, and *Savvy* by Ingrid Law.