

## *North of Beautiful*

**Justina Chen Headley**

**Reviewed by: Sophia Cheng, Age 15**

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

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Define beautiful. Is it marked by flawless skin and a striking supermodel figure, or is it more than that, a deeper meaning to a simple word? At first glance, Terra Rose Cooper meets the standards of beautiful, but Terra disagrees. She is hampered by her insecurities, namely the port-wine stain birthmark covering her cheek, always carefully concealed to prevent unwanted attention. It is not so different from how she has hidden herself within layers and layers that show only what others expect of her. To her boyfriend, she is fearless, exuding confidence and purpose. To her best friend Karin, she is smart, artistically talented, and in complete control of her life. However, they have failed to take notice of the other side of her.

No one understands the life Terra is desperately trying to escape by following her brothers' footsteps in leaving for college and the world beyond. They do not see that Terra's battlefield is within her own home, with her verbally abusive, dictatorial father and weak-willed mother. That is, until she meets Jacob, whose path clashes with Terra's due his own family issues. Able to relate to him more personally than she can with her closest friends, even though they have such contrasting lifestyles, Terra quickly accepts his friendship. Then, when Terra's receives two tickets to China from her brother, Terra and her mom, accompanied by Jacob and his mom, travel to a foreign land where Terra discovers the meaning of True Beauty amid bustling streets and historic sights.

*North of Beautiful* by Justina Chen Headley is a captivating book that touches upon many subjects, the most powerful one being about a person's true beauty. It is written in a way so people can reflect on their own imperfections, and by the end of the book, come to their own conclusion about what beauty is. It helps that the characters are multi-dimensional like real people; complex and steadily developing individually through their experiences. Along the way, you grow into Terra's character, seeing the world through her eyes. The only downside of the book would be the geographic terms only because the definitions are not provided. Seeing how the story is cartography-themed, these terms are crucial to the story and to the characters, but without knowing their meanings, their significance becomes difficult to discern.

I would recommend this book to teenagers because it deals with problems that are relatable in many different levels, whether in school or outside of school. In addition, the book is written around the high school reading level, with tougher vocabulary and lots of symbolism.

### **Recommended Titles**

If you found *North of Beautiful* absolutely enthralling, other books to add to your to-read list include *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata, *So B. It* by Sarah Weeks, *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, and *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon G. Flake.