



Reaching for Sun

Tracie Vaughn Zimmer

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Josie Wyatt knows what it means to be different. Her family's small farmhouse seems to shrink each time another mansion grows up behind it. She lives with her career-obsessed mom and opinionated Gran, but has never known her father. Then there's her cerebral palsy: even if Josie wants to forget that she was born with a disability, her mom can't seem to let it go. Yet when a strange new boy—Jordan—moves into one of the houses nearby, he seems oblivious to all the things that make Josie different. Before long, Josie finds herself reaching out for something she's never really known: a friend... and possibly more. Interlinked free verse poems tell the beautiful, heartfelt story of a girl, a family farm reduced to a garden, and a year of unforgettable growth.

Reaching for Sun Details

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Author : Tracie Vaughn Zimmer

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From Reader Review Reaching for Sun for online ebook

Brittany Davis says

Junior Book Log

Title: Reaching for Sun

Author: Tracie Vaughn Zimmer

Category: Schneider Family

Source: Junior Book Award 2008

Reaching for Sun tells the story of a seventh-grade girl named Josie who was born with cerebral palsy. The author wrote the book as a set of free verse poems that are separated into the four seasons, and tells the story of one full year of Josie's life. She starts off feeling different and an outsider who doesn't have a great relationship with her mother so she just follows the lead of her Gram. Then Josie meets Jordan, a boy who moves in a new house behind Josie's. They form a deep meaningful relationship, as Jordan is also feeling distant and an outcast. At the end Josie is focusing more on her creativity and love for the outdoors with the support of Jordan and Gram. My favorite aspect of the book is that Zimmerman added is a growing flower on the bottom right corner of the page. It is a small flower that at the beginning is small and weak, but at the end is strong and beautiful, it creates a flipbook. This is a great representation of the path Josie was on that year of her life, how much she transformed and grew up into a young woman. This would be a great novel for upper elementary school students as the rich vocabulary in the free verse poems is right on and the students will be able to relate to the emotions felt by Josie. This would be a great book to use as an example and have the students write their own free verse poems. I believe the student would thoroughly enjoy this book and I highly recommend it!

Laura says

Usually, I don't like verse at all. I haven't read a book in verse since my "conversion" into liking poetry this summer. I got Reaching for Sun without knowing it is written in verse, and surprised myself by liking the first poem. I figured that if I liked the first poem, I might like the second. If I liked the second, I might like the third, etc. until I had read the entire book.

Josie suffers from cerebral palsy, and everything not thought about by people without cerebral palsy is painful. She struggles to walk normal, talk normal, just look normal. She loves the escape from school at three each day, where she can run home to her grandmother, and frolic on her family's dwindling farmland. Sometimes the taunts that Josie is mentally challenged get to her, even though she is really bright and even witty at times.

Life as Josie knew it comes to a complete halt when she meets Jordan, who unlike any other, sees behind her mangled hand and slow speech. Jordan becomes part of Josie's small family- all while Josie is pretending to be at speech camp. She started skipping on the first day when she saw she was the only eighth grader. She's going to have to break it to her Mom someday, but just not now. It's always "Not now..."

I'm really happy this won the Schneider Family book award. The plot is a little slow, especially in the beginning. Other than that, I really felt that Zimmer understood Josie and completely immersed herself into Josie's character. I couldn't read any "adult" in the poetry, with the exception of the very last poem. I find that the Schneider Family book award generally picks some of my favorite books. A Mango Shaped Space

won, and now I am even more curious to read all the winners.

Joana says

So this is a rare occasion, but it I really enjoyed this book even though it was written in verse. My main complaint with poetry books is that they I cannot connect to the characters, but this was not the case with this story.

We follow young Josie who has cerebral palsy, and her life with her mom and grandma. She meets a young boy named Jordan, and both become best friends, as he doesn't judge her for her disease (unlike all other kids at school).

This book was so sweet and heartwarming. I couldn't put it down, and really enjoyed reading it.

A definite recommend when it comes to poetry books.

Anke says

Reaching for Sun by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer is a 2008 Schneider Family Book Award winner. This book is written in free verse poetry, narrated by the protagonist Josie Wyatt, a middle school student with cerebral palsy. Josie lives in a small farmhouse with her mother and grandmother. Acres of their farmland needed to be sold when her mom decided to go back to college to pursue her career. Subsequently, the sold land becomes a new development consisting of enormous homes. Fortunately for Josie, a boy named Jordan moves into one of the new mini mansions and he becomes her new and first real friend. Jordan is a unique, quirky boy who sees Josie for Josie, not her disability and it's through him and Josie's voice, with her beautifully written free verse poetry, that we appreciate this unique friendship.

The reader also sees clearly through Josie's eyes the social isolation, miscommunication, stereotypes and pain that come with cerebral palsy. To avoid being seen walking oddly in the hallways between classes, Josie hides in the bathroom. She also doesn't like people to see her entering "Room 204". And the fact that she talks slowly does not mean "she's retarded" as many kids whisper behind her back.

Josie has many strengths, she knows herself better than your typical 12-year-old and this story does a fantastic job showing us how she grows up and changes during the course of one year, especially when she encounters the challenge of Jordan going off to camp and her grandmother becoming ill. When students read this book they will learn that what you see on the outside is not what is heard or felt on the inside. And if they look a little deeper, they will learn that opening yourself up to friendships with all kinds of people, can change your life.

On the bottom right hand corner of the book is a sketch of a blooming flower. It starts off as a small bud and grows tall, in full bloom on the last page. If you skim the pages quickly, similar to an animated flip book, you can see the flower move as it grows and eventually blooms as it "reaches for the sun."

This would be a wonderful book to use in middle school when studying poetry, journal writing and what makes people different. Tracie Vaughn Zimmer's webpage gives this a reading level from ages 9 through 12.

L- Lisa says

Reaching for Sun is a story in verse, providing the insights to the world of protagonist Josie, a girl who lives with cerebral palsy. She is aware of her limitations and her strengths, as well as the social isolation during the middle school years. She lives with two strong characters, her mom who is never home between work and school and her gram who provides warmth and wisdom. As Jordan enters the story, the new sensitive and geeky kid in the neighborhood, Josie finds real friendship with a peer who sees her as a person rather than a disability. When Gram becomes ill, Josie has opportunity to shine with her strengths, during time of sadness and loss. The poems flow in this book, creating a vivid picture of Josie as she narrates her story. It provides increased awareness of what it means to live with a disability in a seemingly authentic voice. I was surprised at how quickly I read the book, in part because I did not want to put it down. This format would be a good introduction to free verse in middle level and perhaps grades 9-10. I would include it as an option for a book group, introducing journal writing using a free verse format.

Valerie says

I usually hesitate with books in verse though the few that I have read I liked. After being told how great Reaching for Sun was I decided to give it a try.

I read it in one day and it was effortless. In the few words that are used I understood what was trying to be said. Cerebral Palsy makes others around Josie think she is retarded but she knows full well about the things going on around her. Josie is realistic in her views of the world but not really self pitying. She is more frustrated than anything I think.

13-year-old Josie has lived with her mother and grandmother for all her life and has never had a friend until a new neighbor comes in. From there a friendship blossoms as they spend time together. But it all isn't sweet and sugary just because of her new friend. Josie sees her mother's efforts as being told that her mother think she needs to be fixed. Classmates treat her as if she were stupid still.

A simple book full of feeling. I might've liked it better as a novel but for what it is it deserves a lot of credit.

Kristen Luppino says

A book told from the point of view of a girl with cerebral palsy in poems. A voice that should be heard. It's about finding a place in a world that doesn't consider you having a place. Beautiful.

Shel says

Zimmer, T.V. (2007). Reaching for Sun. New York: Bloomsbury.

181 pages.

Appetizer: Josie Wyatt is in the seventh grade. She lives with her mom (who is almost never around since she's trying to complete her college degree) and her grandmother. She hates school. She's never met her father. Her family has had to sell most of their farm land and must watch subdivisions for the rich be built around their house. She is bullied by most of the kids at school. And she has cerebral palsy.

Reaching for the Sun is set over (just about) a year as Josie makes her first friend, deals with her grandmother's deteriorating health and struggles to find the words to get her mom to let her not participate in a summer clinic designed to help her with her cerebral palsy.

This novel in verse is written by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a local author who I have heard speak a couple of times, and who (full-disclosure!) made contact with the literary agency that would eventually represent me. So far, this is my favorite book by her. Josie's voice is honest and poignant. The moment that really drew me in was when she thinks about what type of man her absentee-father must be:

"I wonder
if he ditched me and Mom
when he found out about my disability,
or if it gave him the excuse he needed--
typed letter left behind in the mailbox,
no stamp.
I wonder if I got my straight
blond hair, blue eyes,
and cowardice from him,
and whether he's real smart,
rich, and now got himself
a picture-perfect family" (p. 15)
Ouch!

Throughout the book, there are also illustrations of a flower growing in the bottom right margin of each page. As you go through the story, Josie grows and blossoms as a character and the flower grows and blossoms too. I thought this was a wonderful touch that complimented the content and name of the story beautifully.

Overall, I found Reaching for Sun to be a very touching and realistic story of a girl coming into her own.

Dinner Conversation:

"The last bell rings,
but
I'm hiding
in the last stall
of the girls' bathroom
until I hear
voices
disappear behind closing
classroom doors.

Only then
do I slip out
into the deserted hallway
and rush to room 204,
a door

no one
wants to be seen opening.

Not even
me." (p. 3).

"With my odd walk
and slow speech
everyone knows
I've got special ed,
but if I wait
until the hall clears,

taunts like tomatoes
don't splatter
the back of my head" (p. 4).

"Mom wants me
to love school like she does,
follow her lead to college,
make my mark:
the first astronaut with
cerebral palsy,
or at least
a doctor or lawyer,
something with a title or abbreviations, I guess.
But Mom's dreams for me
are a heavy wool coat I
wear, even in summer." (p.46).

Tasty Rating: !!!!

Cara says

I had always thought I wasn't into books in prose, but I know I'm wrong now. It takes talent to tell a story without too many words, but with enough imagery to capture the readers interest.

Josie is a girl with cerebral palsy and feels very much on the outskirts of life. Until one day she meets a fellow outsider, Jordan, does she begin to feel a sense of normalcy. Though the book is short we go through a year of Josie's life and quite a year it is. On the lower right hand corner of the page there is a picture of a flower emerging and once you reach the end that flower is in full bloom, much like the journey of Josie's year of growing up.

I would have liked to have seen a novel based on these characters but I do understand that the author's strength is prose so I won't lament too much about that. My favorite line, "**For the first time I feel as broken inside as everyone must see on the outside.**" Though that is the line that touched me the most my favorite part would have to be on page 158.

I think I really could appreciate this story even more because I know someone who has to live like Josie, and it made me smile to know that Josie saw a way to live her life and be happy.

Jesse German says

Reaching for Sun is a wonderful book that opens up your eyes to what it is like living with cerebral palsy. The book follows a young girl named Josie and is written in first person from her perspective. One thing I really enjoyed about this book was that it was written in poem form, which kept me focused and intrigued throughout the whole book. At the beginning of the book, Josie feels really alone and only has her grandmother to talk to until a boy named Jordan moves in the rich neighborhood next to her family farm. He is really into science which fascinates Josie. They begin doing experiments with her Gran with flowers and planting. When summer comes, Jordan goes off to summer camp and Josie's Gran has a stroke which leaves her unable to talk and in the hospital. I think that this book is a great example of all of the curveballs life throws at you and the strength it takes to persevere, as Josie does. The book ends with Jordan and Josie's Gran coming back home and although things will be different you get the feeling that they are all going to be okay. This book is a great realistic fiction novel because this story could easily be true. It is very easy to connect with the characters in this book. I think that any student 3-5 or older would love reading Reaching For Sun. An activity you could use this book for is having students write poems focusing on a hardship in their life or using a character from the book.

L-Crystal Wlodek says

This poem novel is recommended for students in grades 7 and up and is a Schneider Family Book Award (2008). This book chronicles the life and struggles of Josie, a seventh grade girl with Cerebral Palsy, who lives with her mother and grandmother. It also describes in detail a blooming friendship between Josie and Jordan, her neighbor, as well as challenges, which include her grandmother's illness and her best friend going off to camp for the summer.

This is a heartwarming and inspiring story is hard to put down. The unique poetry format also adds to the appeal of the book. It is a quick read and a relatable book with issues regarding friendship, life struggles, illness, and family. Josie, the narrator of the book, is bright and does not fully realize her limitations or her strengths. The language used throughout the free verse poetry novel is also particularly strong. Reaching for Sun has wide appeal for readers of diverse abilities. Reluctant readers will be attracted to the simplicity of the text, with short chapters and lots of white space on each page. Every poem included really adds to the flow of the book, so much so that some readers may not even realize that they are reading poetry. However, more advanced readers will find enjoyment in the poetic structure used throughout the book. Overall, this book is touching, uniquely written, and will appeal to a wide range of readers as they discover what it feels like to live with a disability.

Melissa says

I would recommend this book for grade 7 and up. This is a story about a girl named Josie. She has cerebral palsy and lives in a farm with her family. Developers are trying to take the land from her family. I love that

this story is told from a seventh graders point of view in free-verse! It makes the story so much more rich and almost tangible. A rich boy named Jordan moves to a mansion behind the farmhouse, Josie soon realizes they have similar passions. Jordan is neglected by his father, so he enjoys Josie's company. Both Josie and Jordan love nature, so the novel is filled with botanical images - a nice touch! Josie's grandmother works with her in the garden and really helps her grow throughout the book...like a flower. I really enjoyed the short chapters and the simplicity of the text. The book was well written and easy to read. This is a great book for all students and even for an all class poetry unit!

Jenni Frencham says

Zimmer, Tracie. *Reaching for Sun*. Bloombury, 2007.

Josie has cerebral palsy, and she doesn't have many friends at school because it is difficult for her to communicate. When Jordan moves next door, though, she finds a friend who sees past her disability and is willing to get to know her. Told in blank verse, this is a story of a year in Josie's life as she advocates for herself and her needs as well as dealing with the ups and downs of life in general.

This book was a very fast read. Blank verse in general takes less time to read than prose, but this book is maybe 1/10th the size of an Ellen Hopkins book, so I finished it during the first half of my lunch break. It's a good book in that we see the thoughts and musings of Josie and she's shown as what she is - a normal teen who argues with her mother, lies about skipping therapy, and gets upset when Jordan goes away to science camp for four weeks. Her disability doesn't limit her thoughts or imagination or hopes or dreams. This book is an excellent one to use as both a window and a mirror. Recommended.

Recommended for: tweens, teens

Red Flags: none

Overall Rating: 3/5 stars

Read-Alikes: *Out of My Mind*, *Stuck in Neutral*, *Girls Like Us*

Mary says

Recommended for ages 10 and up

From Booklist

As if seventh grade weren't enough of a challenge for anyone, Josie also struggles with cerebral palsy, social isolation, a mom she needs more time and support from, and monster bulldozers that are carving up the countryside to build huge homes around her family's old farmhouse. Enter new neighbor Jordan, a sensitive kid whose geeky, science-loving ways bring a fun spirit of discovery into Josie's days. He melds with her and her family, especially the warm and wise Gram, and the friends create a kind of magic as they conduct all kinds of plant and pond experiments. Further challenges face Josie when Gram becomes ill and Jordan goes off to camp. Then, risking her mom's wrath, Josie secretly ditches her hated therapy sessions; when mother and daughter eventually reconcile, Josie emerges from her rough patch in a believable and transforming way. Written in verse, this quick-reading, appealing story will capture readers' hearts with its winsome heroine and affecting situations. Anne O'Malley

I fell in love with this story and it's language. Writing about poetry is difficult for me to do, so I dont know

that I can express my full joy when reading this book. The actual story of Josie's relationships with her mother, grandmother and friend was fantastic and engaging. However, the language that Zimmer uses in this book toppled me. I found myself bookmarking particular passage that I re-read to friends and family members. When Gram gives Josie a quilt with the "colors of summer- watermelon, tomato, blue skies and lemonade" I was overwhelmed with feeling, thinking, "Yes! That is summer!" Zimmer, so gently and beautifully tells the story of Josie, often through metaphor of the flowers and plants in the garden and surrounding land. I have never really liked poetry. I didn't get it and didn't like the formulaic poetry we were made to write in school. However, this book has completely changed my idea of poetry. Gorgeous! I will buy this book!

Jessica Gilligan says

Vaughn Zimmer, Tracie. (2007). Reaching for Sun. Bloomsbury U.S.A. Children's Books.

Junior Book Log: Schneider Family

2008 Schneider Family Award Winner

I chose this book because someone close to me has cerebral palsy and I wanted to get an idea of what things might be like from her perspective. Although I didn't learn anything I didn't already know, and although this is just a fiction written by someone without cerebral palsy, this story still hit home for me. The main character of this story, Josie, is so similar to the person in my life with cerebral palsy.

Told in the form of a series of poems, we learn that Josie, a 13-year-old girl with cerebral palsy is just another normal teenager, with a depth of emotions, wishes and intelligence. But the world doesn't see her that way: not her single mother who is too busy with school and work, or her over-reaching grandmother, and especially not her classmates. When she's not working in the garden with Granny, she lives in a lonely world of one, being shuffled from one therapy session to another, always outcast from her peers because kids don't understand her disease. One day, fate changes as she meets someone who sees her as she wants to be seen: as she really is, not by her lack of motor control or labored speech. Jordan and Josie become inseparable, as they are both isolated by their peers for different reasons. This is a beautiful, yet painful, story about coping with the setbacks of a disability. It's an essential book for middle school students in that it teaches tolerance and helps kids see things from a different perspective.
