



What Hearts

Bruce Brooks

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Recipient of a 1993 Newbery Honor, this novel is an achingly beautiful, powerfully rendered journey through childhood that is not to be missed, now available in a new edition with a striking new cover.

“From an outstandingly perceptive writer, a moving portrait of a boy, observed at four revealing turning points.” -- Pointer Review/*Kirkus Reviews*

“Combines fast, exciting action with an astonishing ending that proves the power of the individual imagination.” -- Starred Review/*ALA Booklist*

"Asa—possessed of rare sweetness, humor, and inner strength—survives intact cruel tests of his integrity, intellect, and sense of decency. From an outstandingly perceptive writer, a moving portrait of a boy, observed at four revealing turning points." —K. "Told with controlled imagery, insightful illumination of motive and the needs of his characters, Brooks has proven himself once again a master of language." —BL.

1993 Newbery Honor Book

Notable Children's Books of 1993 (ALA)

1993 Best Books for Young Adults (ALA)

1993 Fanfare Honor List (The Horn Book)

1993 Teachers' Choices (IRA)

1993 Books for the Teen Age (NY Public Library)

What Hearts Details

Date : Published May 19th 1999 by HarperCollins (first published October 1st 1992)

ISBN : 9780064471275

Author : Bruce Brooks

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade

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From Reader Review What Hearts for online ebook

Linda Lipko says

Continuing the July YA challenge, and making a dent in the Newbery award-winning books, the latest read is an insightful 1993 honor winner titled *What Hearts* by Bruce Brooks.

At the risk of redundancy, I've mentioned often that young adult books, including some of the later Newbery winners, are not fluff, and in fact deal with some particularly difficult life situations. This book is no exception!

Young Asa's life is suddenly uprooted when he returns home on the last day of first grade to learn that the house is empty and he and his mother are moving. Leaving behind his father, whom his mother states she no longer loves, Asa's mother selfishly immediately thrusts Asa into a life with a new boyfriend and living arrangement.

Lacking a transition time, precocious, sensitive Asa adjusts as best as possible. Astutely he grasps the knowledge that his new "father" is not a kind man and doesn't want the baggage of a little child.

The first night, Asa is taken to an amusement park, placed on an adult ride wherein he is suspended high up in the air for a long period of time while the ride violently shakes the small child. This is the beginning of cruel taunts and actions at the hands of a man who borders on malevolence.

While the subject matter is deep, there is also hope and a strong theme of spunkiness and resiliency. Segmented into four separate sections, each dealing with the meaning of love, the definition of forgiveness, the power of friendship and the ability of the human spirit to somehow transcend difficulty, this is an incredibly powerful book.

Highly recommended.

Jrobertus says

a newberry award winning young adult novel, and i see why. it relates 4 episodes in a sensitive boys life and tells them well.

Josiah says

Incredible! The writing of Bruce Brooks in this story is something beyond simple greatness. It is a turbocharged rocket moving with speed and dexterity beyond what the average human can comprehend. It is a living thing, a dynamic creature bursting with pure verve at its every seam, descriptive beyond what one could ever expect from a novel and flowing with a potent and challenging immediacy that is more a thing of beauty than just about anything else I've ever seen from a book. The writing of Bruce Brooks in *What Hearts* literally, and I mean *literally*, stole my breath away and left me in amazed wonderment.

The narrative reads, really, like four distinct stories loosely built around the life of a quietly luminous boy

named Asa Hill, four different snapshots taken at progressive points during his childhood. These moments might not seem terribly important in the big scheme of things, but in truth they help to define who Asa *is*. More than that, these happenings in his life reveal to Asa himself the person he is and the person he is becoming, letting him see the things he can change, the things he can't change, and the things from both of these ends that he doesn't *want* to change.

What Hearts is, in my experience, a totally unique book. It can be difficult to tell what is real and what parts are products of Asa's fertile and indefatigable mind. A lot of this leads to questions that dot the narrative all the way through, some of which are answered, some merely hinted at, and others that are never addressed at all. The end product is a book that feels astonishingly like real life and not like a fabricated story at all, no matter how skillfully rendered such a story might be.

What I take from this book most of all is its shockingly sharp perception—a degree of perception that made me feel as if Asa and I were as one, sharing a soul with all of its nuances and complications that I thought only I could see—and the pulsating, glowing use of language that Bruce Brooks puts on exhibit from page one. This is the kind of very rare book that reminds me exactly why I write, why I read, why I allow characters and the writing of others to influence me so strongly. It's because when an author like Bruce Brooks comes along, so very uncommonly, it makes it all worth it. Consuming his breathtaking writing is like eating the most wonderful food in the world, and having it nourish both my mind *and* stomach. *What Hearts* is a tour de force in the strongest and truest possible sense of the word, and I deeply loved every minute of it. I loved it to my innermost core.

Meepspeeps says

This is a poignant story of a resilient boy facing some of the most difficult circumstances adults inflict on children. When his parents divorce (announced on first page so not a spoiler!), "now, for the first time, his life had a past, a past that would not get any bigger, that would always be shrinking but would never disappear." The boy's thoughts and author's descriptions carried me into the feelings and circumstances: ugly subjects using beautiful prose. I recommend it to third graders and above, especially to those who are dealing with divorce and stepparents.

Kate says

Warning: this book rips your heart out and stomps on it.

Stephanie says

Bruce Brooks wrote some of my favorite children's/YA books. His prose is pristine--better than most adult fiction writers. And he writes about precocious kids (in elementary school), who come of age early. All you folks who got straight A's in elementary/middle school, who won spelling bees and did math counts...and had weird family problems, you'd be able to relate ^_^

Kayla (BooksAndAllSorts) says

A story of growing up, adapting, and hardships, What Hearts is a story like no other. Asa is lovable and kind, and you will love watching him ride the wild roller-coaster that is his life.

Mckinley says

While I was interested in the events, I felt they were rushed and forced rather than let Asa and also the reader immerse in the issues and thus coming through to understanding. I don't think it works for a young adult audience given the wide range of ages of Asa in the stories.

Jim says

Not a book about baseball despite the cover.

It is a terrific read about a 5 year-old growing to sixth grade while dealing w/divorce, friendships, fitting-in, constantly moving, a step-father, a mother's mental illness and first love.

Had the award existed ten years earlier, it might have received a Schneider award.

Steve Ward says

A book full of emotions that is well written. Wasn't sure where the author was going at first but once he established the angst of the main character it was a compelling story. I think kids need to be ten years or more to fully appreciate the intricate details woven into the story.

Amanda S. says

Although I found the storyline to be mediocre, the author's ability to express raw emotions and clearly portray the main character's deepest feelings was phenomenal!

twice_baked👉? says

[She leaves Dave in the end. (hi

Lynette Caulkins says

Brooks gives us a look at the difficulties of relationships, mental health issues, and a child's adaptations. It took me a while to get "un-distracted," because so often in the beginning, a 5-yo thinks and speaks in the words of a mature adult in a way no 5-yo does, regardless of how precocious they are. The unreliable

narrator bits are fun when you realize what is happening.

Jasey says

I'm not entirely sure what to rate this, because although it's undoubtedly a wonderful book, I didn't quite *get* it. But then again, I'm only a 12 year old whose maturity rate and intelligence probably can't match up to the author's. I didn't get the message that it sent, and I'm not entirely sure that there *was* a message to be sent, but I'll probably try to read this again once I think that I might have a bit more of an understanding.

Luann says

What Hearts is divided into four sections each dealing with a turning point in Asa's life - events such as his parents divorce as a young boy and learning to fit in at school after school as he moves multiple times with his mother and stepfather. During the entire story, we are in Asa's head and so only get to see things from his perspective. I actually found this to be quite interesting and very readable. Much more than I expected! My favorite segment was called "Not Blue" and told of Asa pairing up with a boy in his class to present a poem at a class Show Night. This won a Newbery Honor in 1993.
