



Do You Think This Is Strange?

Aaron Cully Drake

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Freddy is having a rough year.

First, he is expelled from school for fighting. Now, at his new school, he is required to have regular conversations with a counselor—an awkward situation for anyone, really, but even more so for Freddy, who has autism. Not only that, Freddy's mom left years ago and his dad drinks too much.

But then Saskia—a fair-haired girl Freddy hasn't seen in ten years—appears at his new school. As children they attended the same group therapy sessions, and now she is hardly the same person he remembers. She doesn't smile. And she doesn't talk. But their reunion provides him with respite in a difficult time, and sets a chain of meetings and events into motion that reveals long-repressed memories and brings Freddy to a unexpectedly freeing moment of truth. A funny and touching coming-of-age story you won't forget.

Do You Think This Is Strange? Details

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Author : Aaron Cully Drake

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From Reader Review Do You Think This Is Strange? for online ebook

Delia says

In the acknowledgements the author mentions "cutting out the fat", as a result the sparseness of the prose is perfect for this book. A book that makes one think, and laugh, and makes one appreciate all the characters that cross our paths; what is their story?

Linda says

I love this carefully crafted novel that skates along the fine line between YA and adult fiction. I appreciated the comic relief in a story that just gets sadder and sadder and the dignified treatment of the young protagonist. This is a writer to watch!

Angélique (MapleBooks) says

"Everything was irrelevant except that I didn't fit in, had never fit in, and it would be best if I didn't fit in somewhere else."

Recently, Lisa Genova introduced me to another kind of diverse literature; a literature in which people's perception of the world differs from the majority of us due to their condition: *Still Alice* 's protagonist suffers from an early onset of Alzheimer, while *Love Anthony* is about a mother grieving an autistic son. Aaron Cully Drake might be our Canadian equivalent of Lisa Genova. His debut novel *Do You Think This Is Strange?* is a riveting novel narrated by a highly functional autistic seventeen-years old. The author, whose daughter has autism, managed to create an accessible and lovable character, opening the reader's mind to a condition very little understood amongst the public.

Do You Think This Is Strange?'s main character is Frederick Wyland—called Freddy—a high schooler who carries a tragic, heartbreaking memory: when he was 7, his mother left him at the train station and disappeared. In Freddy's mind, the traumatic event has been a blur for years but when he is unexpectedly reunited with Saskia, one of his few childhood friends, memories slowly come back.

First thing I loved in *Do You Think This is Strange?* was how Freddy was a strong, proud character. People with autism are often depicted as impaired, dysfunctional individuals even though the spectrum is extremely wide. Yet, Freddy won't let you pity him. He is a sensitive, intelligent young man with a strong personality and sense of justice. His autism isn't really a problem: neurotypicals' narrow minds are. They ask ambiguous questions; how can they expect specific answers? They insist on having conversation; what's the use of "small talk"? They misinterpret situations they know nothing about and constantly need to label people. They behave irrationally. They even use words that are supposed to express the exact opposite of what they mean: often, his father sourly states "That's just great!" for instance.

I loved how the roles were reversed, how Aaron Cully Drake demonstrated the logic behind Freddy's behaviour, and how neurotypicals were the ones who looked strange in this novel.

“Saskia Stiles was my new Favourite Thing because, when she was around, my least favourite thing—other people—stayed away. She was a human antidote.”

Also, Freddy's very slow bonding with Saskia was also spectacularly well written. In a world where everything happens so fast, in which people hate “wasting their time”, where everything is standardized and formatted, Freddy and Saskia's interactions were as moving as humorous. They take tiny, shy but heroic steps toward each other and each effort is so much more meaningful considering how hard it is for them. The story of Freddy and Saskia shows that the seemingly impossible can happen, provided you give everyone the space and time they need. It also raises question about what is communication and friendship.

“With Saskia at my table, there was no need to concentrate on mundane banter. There was no need to try to anticipate questions, or analyze comments for non-literal meanings. So I relaxed and became the person I wanted to be. Saskia and I sat in our two solitudes, together enough that we could let each other be safely alone.”

Finally, I loved the story of Freddy's family: the relation between Freddy and his father, the mystery behind the disappearance of Freddy's mother, the struggle of raising a child with autism. I particularly like the complexity of Freddy's father. Aaron Cully Drake didn't try to depict the perfect or worst father ever, just a father who's really doing his best to cope and doesn't always manage to. He also gave a voice to autistic children's parents, in a heartbreaking way similarly to *Love Anthony* by Lisa Genova:

“Then there was the stage where we stopped pretending that some things were getting better. Because some things weren't. That's the stage where we knew it would be like this forever. (...) And when you realize something like that, your world collapses like a mud hut. It drops down on you, and there's no more lying about it. Your son has autism. He has it and he'll have it the rest of his life.”

I saw *Do You Think This Is Strange?* called a “teen romance” somewhere. It felt *extremely* reductive to me. Yes, the book features teenagers; yes, it does feature love; but the book is much more than this, I believe. It questions the concept of normality and relationship; it raises awareness about people with autism; it does, hopefully, trigger interest and understanding towards people who behave differently than the majority. To put it simply, *Do You Think This Is Strange?* is a very human book that everyone should read.

Beverly K says

Though this book defied my ability to read it in one sitting, I feel like it's an important book to read and, from what I can tell, depicts autism fairly well. The story itself, once you reach the end, is somewhat heartbreaking.

Amy says

This was actually really fantastic

Vanessa says

This is absolutely the best book I've read this year.

Every now and again there is a novel that can change the way you view the world. For me, the first book that did this was *Minister Without Portfolio* by Michael Winter and you can read my review of this book [here](#) . The second is *Do You Think This Is Strange?*. I could not stop reading this novel, nor could I stop laughing! Through humour and wonderful insight Aaron Cully Drake shows just how the daily life of an autistic teenager is, and it's not so different than every other teenager.

We watch the story unfold through 17 year old Autistic Freddy, whose literal interpretation of the world not only gets him into awkward conversations but gets him into fights with bullies. His narration is humorous as well as insightful as Freddy is very aware of how horrible he is at conversation and after getting hospitalized by a group of kids kicking the crap out of him he takes steps to ensure it doesn't happen again. He remembers everything that's happened to him and everything he's done that has or hasn't gone well for him. Drake unfolds the narrative slowly and steadily through Freddy's flashbacks as they either distract him from his daily life or consume him during his quiet thought filled moments at the end of each day and through the present ordeals Freddy faces. We see Freddy learn to deal with bullying, reconnect with an old friend, have his first kiss, and reconcile his life with his father.

While laughter kept me reading at the start, the weight of the turning point towards the end of the novel is what will stay with me. I don't think I can ever look at another person without the compassion this book has shown me. We judge too quickly, categorizing personalities, traits, and habits into normal and not, and for what? The comfort that the 'normal' can stand on one side of the fence and label all the rest? This book shows how there really is no fence, no line, no difference. We're all human, we all live the lives that are before us, come to terms with love and loss, and we're all aware of this world in one way or another. This is a book I will keep on my top shelf along with *Jane Austen*, *The Luminaries*, *Meditations*, *Three Day Road*, and of course *Minister Without Portfolio*.

Bev Maclaurin says

This is written in the voice of an autistic boy. It is a young adult book but I thought it was well-worth reading. It was entertaining and realistic.

karen says

Correlation is not causation. Even when you know it's not causation, you still can't stop thinking about it.

you know what i think is strange?? that i liked this book. if you had asked me if the world needed another

book told from the POV of an autistic character, i would have said "no. no we do not." i completely understand why it is tempting for a writer and appealing to a reader to produce/read books like this - it offers a perspective and a worldview that is outside the experience of many of us, and it's a novel lens through which to view the familiar world. or it *would* be novel if it hadn't already been done to death. by now it's just gimmicky and redundant.

however, this one won me over completely. and maybe it's because i didn't read a lot of the big, popular recent autism-POV books like *The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism* or *The Rosie Project*, so i'd had a respite, but man - i was utterly charmed by this. UTTERLY CHARMED. and maybe you will be less charmed if you have autism-burnout, but that will be sad for you because you will not be able to enjoy this book. it claims to be for fans of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and maybe it is, but i am living proof that it is also for people who hated that book.

freddy is a seventeen-year-old boy who has just had to change schools after being expelled for fighting. any kind of routine-upheaval is devastating for people with autism, and since freddy is still trying to process his mother's abrupt disappearance ten years ago, this is just one more confusing layer added to his existence as he struggles to interpret social cues in a life he shares with his overwhelmed, alcoholic father. he is forced to attend regular counseling sessions at his new school as he attempts to acclimate, and things really start to foment when he is reunited with saskia, a girl who is also on the spectrum, who'd been his best friend before she also disappeared from his life ten years earlier.

their reunion is complicated and unusual to an outsider. saskia no longer speaks, she only squeaks, and this, in addition to scrawling pink floyd lyrics to freddy, is how she communicates with him. but their relationship had always been singular from outward appearances:

Saskia has seen my bedroom. I have seen hers. Back when our parents still made us put on pyjamas before one of us had to leave, we would retreat to the bedroom and ignore each other like very good friends should do.

Within the slim definition of 'play' that applies to autistic children, Saskia Stiles and I played. We bounced around rooms, at Excalibur House, without bumping into each other. Most people thought we were ignoring each other, but if you asked me what I did for the day, I would have told you that I played with Saskia. She would have said the same.

When we played, I was happy. She let me do the things that I wanted to do, with no other demands. I let her do the things that she wanted to do, with no other demands. we were glad for each other's company. It was enough.

between saskia's reappearance and freddy's counseling sessions, the threads of his thoughts begin to stir as he remembers bits and pieces of the past, both with his mother and after her disappearance, which he struggles to process. the novel is made up of freddy's experiences at seventeen along with many revealing, nonlinear memories fading in and out in-between. it's a big-hearted coming-of-age story, a character study with a strong voice, and also a family mystery. and like the best of its kind, it's funny and sweet and sad and ultimately hopeful.

i really loved freddy, and while i did not love his father as a person, his frustration and helplessness and anger were very realistic as character traits. it's a touching story, but it isn't at all cutesy, and the ending genuinely surprised me.

tell me you don't love this kid:

I try not to smile. It's better for all concerned.

I smiled the day my father told me that my mother would not be coming home again. He, on the other hand, wasn't smiling. I heard him the night before, and deep into the morning, his banging around the kitchen, his watching television in the living room.

His eyes were all puffy and red, and I knew he needed to be comforted. I recalled relevant scenes in literature and concluded that a good way to comfort an unhappy person is to try to cheer them up. Relevant examples also included affirming the individual by overly praising them.

I smiled as broadly as I could.

"Well, that's fantastic," I said to my father, and did not break the smile. "You should be very proud."

Perhaps my smile was too wide - I can't tell.

I am, at the age of 17, a veteran of this war, this battle to communicate with the outside world before it communicates with me. I have lost many battles where I smiled when I shouldn't have smiled.

A neutral demeanour resonates with my character. It isn't hostile, so others aren't threatened. It isn't happy, so others aren't chatty. It's so perfect a display of no opinion, that few people think I have an opinion. As a result, few people ask for it.

When I don't offer an opinion, when I don't offer a response, when I don't display easily misinterpreted emotions, I don't get into trouble.

*I used to think my solution to life was to understand how to talk to other people. In reality, the solution to my life was how to understand how to **avoid** talking to other people.*

And that's why I never smile.

i approve of this debut!

come to my blog!

Jasmine Holloman says

April 13:

Won this book through Goodreads First Reads and I can not wait to start!

June 16:

I never read a book about autism before but this one wanted me to read more. It gripped all of my emotions including humor and sadness. Great twist at the end.

I hope the author dives deeper into Freddy & Sakia's relationship!

Sonia says

Funny, sad and heartbreaking all at the same time. Do you think this is strange grabbed me from the first page and refused to let go until the last page. The depiction of the autistic mind and thought processes was authentic and made me cheer for Freddy as he navigated his way through his school years.

Jennifer says

I loved the fact that this was written from an autistic teen's perspective and the fact that we got a glimpse of two different teens on the spectrum. The ending was a surprise- not at all what I expected.

Dolores says

Something happened to Freddy and Saskia ten years ago. This humorous and heartbreaking coming-of-age story is not just about a boy with autism....it's about how people view and respond to him. I had never read anything quite like it before and I highly recommend it!

TL says

Birthday gift from my book fairy karen *big hug*, thanks!

There is a web between people. The strands are the bonds that they make with each other. The stronger the love for another, the stronger the bond and the stronger the thread.

3.5 stars in some parts and 4 stars in others.

Quick review since I'm on lunch break at work.

Getting to know Freddy and seeing how different people each dealt/responded with/to him was interesting.

Sometimes Freddy got on my nerves with his behavior but I could see where he was coming from in his mind and why he thought that way, even if I didn't understand him.

This wasn't gripping for me right away but it did keep my interest from the beginning. There were a couple of times I wanted to give Saskia and Freddy a big hug (even if they wouldn't have welcomed it).

A couple incidents involving fights Freddy was in seem cut and dry, but little details he tells after the fact on one had me a little proud of him. And also (view spoiler)

The twist at the end I didn't see coming, with Freddy's scattered memories coming together, it was well done.

Freddy's Dad isn't an easy person to like at times, the way he treats Freddy sometimes had me gritting my teeth... even after certain things are revealed, I didn't condone his behavior but understood him a little better I suppose.

It would be easy to lump this in with the 'Rosie Project' and others if its kind but this is a fine story, a hidden gem quality to it. It isn't screaming, so to speak, to get your attention but content to sit quietly in the corner and wait for you.

Would recommend :)

Laury says

Oh my goodness, such a great book! My daughter told me I needed to read it, she found it randomly in the library and decided to give it a try and fell in love. I did too. Smart and funny with emotional twists. I hope this guy writes more, he may be my new favourite Canadian author!

Ragnar says

This is a terrific book. Gripping, funny, poignant, heart wrenching and heart warming
