



The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy

Nikki Loftin

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When Lorelei's old school mysteriously burns down, a new one appears practically overnight: Splendid Academy. Rock-climbing walls on the playground and golden bowls of candy on every desk? Gourmet meals in the cafeteria, served by waiters? Optional homework and two recess periods a day? It's every kids's dream.

But Lorelei and her new friend Andrew are pretty sure it's too good to be true. Together they uncover a sinister mystery, one with their teacher, the beautiful Ms. Morrigan, at the very center.

Then Andrew disappears. Lorelei has to save him, even if that means facing a past she'd like to forget – and taking on a teacher who's a real witch.

What Lorelei and Andrew discover chills their bones – and might even pick them clean!

The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy Details

Date : Published August 21st 2012 by Razorbill

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Author : Nikki Loftin

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From Reader Review The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy for online ebook

Nafiza says

The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy is a middle grade novel which restructures fairy tale elements in a contemporary urban setting. When Lorelei, who has lost a mother and gained a stepmother, finds that a school has risen almost overnight in her neighborhood, she is intrigued. Then when her old school burns down under mysterious circumstances and she has a chance to go to the amazing school with its even more amazing playground, she is thrilled. Missing her mother and not understanding her father's choice in a new wife, she cleaves almost immediately to the principal of her new school who seems to be everything Lorelei needs in a mother.

The novel very interestingly takes bits from the Grimm fairy tales and bits from other folk tales to talk about excesses, materialism, peer pressure and inner strength. Seems heavy for such a slim volume, huh? But rather than being deliberately didactic, the novel imparts its message through narration of the story and the message can be gleaned (or not) by readers. Friendship is another theme in this novel and I really like that Loftin took an overweight kid, showed his misery and then made him cooler than the rest of his so-called classmates who were willingly led like sheep to slaughter. I also thought the witch characters were nicely individualized and deliciously sinister. Then there were the wait staff. The delicate fierceness and anger displayed by them won me over.

Lorelei is a fantastic character. She is not flawless or preachy. She is punky without being abrasive and she displays a lot of vulnerability which leads to some of her less than wise decisions. However, at the end of it all, she makes the right choice and that is all that is needed. The fairy tale bits are awesome and give the story a surreal sense that will alert younger readers to the fantastical nature of the novel and give them the distance they need to read this book without being scared of it. For older readers, this novel will be a treat; it will be a return to story-filled younger days where witches were evil and heroes saved many many lives. I recommend this book. Truly.

Sandra says

The blurb said something about this book was a Hansel and Gretel retelling. **But I believe, that I got more than that.**

This book was so good plot wise and character wise. I just had a little problem with how perfectly it ended up, how easy it was. But other than that, this book is highly enjoyable and on some parts, hilarious.

Full review to follow.

Gabrielle Carolina says

I positively devoured this middle grade debut over a few hours and suggest you do the same when it is released.

Those with a sweet tooth for sweet treats and a sweet tooth for sweet books, this is the tale for you!

I would also like to mention how clean this ARC was! It really says something about both the author and editor- and I always appreciate the effort as a reviewer.

Erica says

Since I heard about this book ages ago, I have been SO excited for *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy*. I love middle grade - it is a growing love of mine. I keep finding more and more fantastic middle grade, which is awesome. I am happy to say that *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* did not disappoint in the least and I have found a new favorite.

With all the elements of a good fairy tale, Nikki Loftin has woven a tale that is filled with the trials of friendship and a chilling plotline. There is the perfect blend of the darker elements of a fairy tale with a unique sense of humor that is the icing on every corner of the book.

I love Lorelei - she is a fantastic protagonist. Clever and witty, Lorelei works together with Andrew to solve the mystery of *Splendid Academy*. I loved watching their friendship grow. Both Lorelei and Andrew aren't the typical students - Lorelei has issue with her writing, which has always set her behind in school, and Andrew has issues with his weight. I loved that Nikki Loftin chose to feature kids that were flawed in their own way, but didn't let it deter them from the final outcome.

The sweet filled plot of *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* was a joy to read. I loved the atypical plot line - while there were the usual elements of a fairy tale, Nikki Loftin takes such a varied path which was a delight to read. It was completely new. Witches, unique mythology, and crafty characters make the perfect story to read.

The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy is a marvelous debut from Nikki Loftin. I already am eagerly anticipating her next release.

Jessica says

A deliciously creepy take on Hansel and Gretel with elements of *The Witches*, *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* is a solid debut novel from author Nikki Loftin. She provides middle-grade readers a story with well-developed characters, a plot that's full of surprises, and strong friendships.

Lorelei has dealt with a lot the past year: the death of her mother, her father's remarriage to her evil stepmother Molly, and now her school has burnt down. But just before she's forced to hike all the way across town each morning, *Splendid Academy* opens right down the street. This school has everything a kid could want from the ultimate playground to candy bowls at your desk to virtually no rules! But is this academy as sweet as it seems? Lorelei adores Principal Trapp. She's beautiful, nice, and seems to understand Molly in a way that few others can. Her teacher, Ms. Morrigan, however, is a complete witch that gives Molly the

creeps from the get go. So when Andrew, the class outcast, shows Lorelei some disturbing behavior the school brings out in their classmates, the pair team up to save their peers and form a heart-warming friendship.

Loftin has created a story with well-defined characters that have quirky characteristics. Children who fit into the middle-grade age group are just beginning to come into their own and tend to butt heads with authority a bit, so they will likely empathize with Lorelei's problems with the adults in her life. In *Splendid*, most of the adults are evil or just can't help her. Her teacher, Ms. Morrigan, and the new music teacher definitely have mean streaks. Lorelei's new stepmother, Molly, is having a difficult time balancing the responsibilities of being a mom with what she wants. Loftin sets her up so that I was constantly wondering if she is eviler than she seems. And, even Lorelei's dad is unable to help her. Still recovering from the death of his wife and trying to help Molly and the children come to terms with one another, Dad is having trouble coping with less-immediate-but-still-important problems in their lives, like Lorelei's writing issues or her problems with her teachers. He has a tendency to be dismissive of his daughter's concerns, not out of a lack of concern but just out of an inability to deal.

Even though *Splendid* is based on a fairy tale, it tackles real issues that children face: obesity, peer pressure, bullying, and dysplasia, to name a few. Many of the characteristics that are considered negative in our culture work out to be a plus for the kids at Splendid Academy. For example, if Andrew did not have weight issues, he would never have noticed the other students' weird reaction to the school. Or, if there wasn't bullying on the playground, its curious ingredient would never have been uncovered.

Nikki Loftin has written a fantastic present-day spin on a treasured fairy tale. *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* was a quick read that drew me in and kept me guessing throughout the story.

Heidi says

When my mom was alive, she read me stories every night. "Use your imagination, Lorelei," she'd say, "and your whole life can be a fairy tale." I wanted that to be true. But I should have paid more attention to the fairy tales.

Because not all of the children in them come out alive. And sometimes there are witches hiding in the woods.

These are the first lines of Nikki Loftin's *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy*, and all that it took me to be sold on Lorelei's story. Lorelei is an eleven year old girl, with more on her mind than all of the normal eleven year old anxieties. A year ago, her mother died—was killed—and Lorelei knows in her gut that she is responsible. Her brother blames her, and no longer treats her as a friend, the one friend she told hasn't spoken to her since, and her father is too distant and busy with his replacement wife to care. Lorelei knows her new stepmother, Molly, is a witch—but really, Lorelei doesn't know anything about witches. Yet.

When after only three days of construction the most miraculous charter school, Splendid Academy, appears not far from their home, Lorelei and her brother Bryan are delighted. The playground is the most amazing thing they have ever seen—it has everything! They want to go there very much, even if it is too good to be true, even if it appeared in three days. Even if their former school just happened to burn to the ground forcing nearly all of the kids in the neighborhood to attend. But it doesn't take Lorelei long to learn that no matter how splendid things seem, something sinisterly sweet is happening at the Splendid Academy.

What I was certain was going to be a light, fluffy, fairy tale esque middle grade with shades of the dark fairy tales surrounding stories of Baba Yaga and Hansel and Gretel turned out to be much deeper and darker than I could have possibly anticipated. When the kids enter Splendid Academy, they're welcomed with free reign, optional assignments, and next to no rules save one—eat. The kids are required to attend the school for not just lunch, but breakfast, have multiple snack times, snacks at recess, and endless candy at their desks. It doesn't take much of a mental leap (or a background in fairy tales) to determine that these children are being fattened up for a witch's brew, but the manor in which this tale plays out is delightfully menacing and sure to make chills run down the spines of the kids who will read it.

Friends, even before we entered the doors of Splendid Academy, my heart was breaking for Lorelei. She'd lost her mother only a year before, and is so certain she is not only responsible, but a murderer. Add to that guilt the fact that she struggles immensely in school due to dysgraphia (at least she thinks it's dysgraphia because her father hasn't bothered to get her tested), a disability similar to dyslexia where instead of words getting jumbled up while reading, they get jumbled up while writing. Lorelei can't even read her own handwriting, and as a result she is labeled as an idiot who receives no special help. Her father is already remarrying Molly, who to me sounds like the most odious woman alive. At the wedding, Lorelei overhears Molly saying to the rector that she believes that it was God's will that Lorelei's mom died to make a place for Molly in their family. If I ever overheard anyone say this sort of thing in real life, I'd probably walk up and deck them.

Through these harsh realities, Nikki Loftin creates an atmosphere where we are constantly torn between wanting Lorelei to escape her family, and wanting her to escape the fate that awaits her at Splendid Academy. I love that I honestly didn't know what choices I wanted Lorelei to make through to the very end. I couldn't blame her for her willful naivety when she only wanted to regain the feeling of being loved that she'd lost along with her mother. I certainly couldn't blame her for feeling pushed aside by her father and brother, and victimized by Molly who behaved so cruelly toward her.

Lorelei's family and the staff at Splendid Academy aren't the only cruelties she encounters. We are, after all, talking about eleven year olds. Lorelei makes a new friend at Splendid, Andrew, a boy who has struggled with obesity for life, and as such is more or less considered a social pariah. Nikki Loftin addresses the reality that for kids, being overweight is similar to having a contagious diseases. People avoid you, make fun of you, and certainly don't include you. Andrew is the perfect friend for a girl who is feeling outcast, as he understands completely. Andrew has learned to control his hunger and cravings, and lost 40 pounds in the process. Together he and Lorelei seem to be the only two children able to resist the delicacies served up constantly at school.

I am curious about the illustrations, if Nikki Loftin illustrated herself? I didn't see this stated anywhere, but nor was an illustrator listed. I loved the cover art for *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy*, as I am a big fan of incorporating the text into the scene, and it certainly evokes the feeling of the book. I didn't feel as if the illustrations were particularly amazing, but they were cute and well incorporated into the story.

The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy is deliciously dark. The story holds a surprising depth of maturity and emotions, and is my favorite type of reminder that most fairy tales do not, in fact, end with 'happily ever after'.

Originally reviewed at Bunbury in the Stacks.

YA Reads Book Reviews says

Originally posted on www.yareads.com, reviewed by Nichole

A deliciously spooky middle-grade debut that's Coraline meets Hansel and Gretel

Lorelei is bowled over by Splendid Academy—Principal Trapp encourages the students to run in the hallways, the classrooms are stocked with candy dishes, and the cafeteria serves lavish meals featuring all Lorelei's favorite foods. But the more time she spends at school, the more suspicious she becomes. Why are her classmates growing so chubby? And why do the teachers seem so sinister?

It's up to Lorelei and her new friend Andrew to figure out what secret this supposedly splendid school is hiding. What they discover chills their bones—and might even pick them clean!

Mix one part magic, one part mystery, and just a dash of Grimm, and you've got the recipe for a cozy-creepy read that kids will gobble up like candy.

Lorelei's life has been turned upside down after her mother died in a tragic (and secret) accident. Now Lorelei's father is remarrying a wicked witch (figuratively) of a woman, and Lorelei feels like nothing could get much worse. Boy, was she wrong.

Before Lorelei knows it, her school burns down to a crisp and a new school, Splendid Academy, is built overnight. Splendid Academy is like every kid's dream. At Splendid Academy you can eat whatever you want, do whatever you want. It's acceptable to run in the hallways and miss class. Heck, you even get candy dishes to munch on during class! Deep inside, Lorelei knows that it's strange that her school burnt down and this new school was built overnight, but why pass up something that seems so perfect?

With the help of her new pal Andrew, Lorelei soon finds out that Splendid Academy isn't so splendid after all. As it turns out, the new faculty is full of witches! And they're trying to fatten all the kids up for a big feast! Lorelei and Andrew must race to save the day. If not, they might just be a midnight snack for one very hungry witch.

While I do not read middle grade books very often, I find a sweet sort of comfort in relaxing down with one. As soon I saw the cover for *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* (my cover is different than the finished copy), I knew that I just had to read this book. Just by looking at the cover, I felt that it would have a similar feel to the Lemony Snicket books. The books ended up being completely different, but I found myself tearing through the pages, as they were addicting and relaxing all at the same time.

Although I did enjoy *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy*, I wasn't the biggest fan of the main character, Lorelei. I found her to be very whiney. However, I did keep reminding myself that this is a middle grade novel. Children at Lorelei's age are supposed to be whiney. On the other hand, I loved the character of Andrew. I had a serious soft spot in my heart for him. Heavy children are picked on relentlessly and that really came across nicely in this book. I thought that it was an excellent thing to show reality in a paranormal book.

The ending of this book was pretty predictable, but I found that that didn't bother me. As I said before, there's something very relaxing about reading middle grade books. I may have known what was going to happen next, but I didn't care. I just wanted to read it for myself.

I had a huge problem with the characters of Lorelei's father and stepmother. I'm often very judgmental about parenting and what was going on really disturbed me. I know it's just a book. I do, but I just wanted to reach into the book and smack Lorelei's father. I felt that it was very unclassy of him to expect his children to respect, appreciate and acknowledge the new woman in his life as their mother. I know it's just a personal issue, but I had a really hard time reading the book when those characters made appearances.

Overall, I would definitely recommend this book. I think that it would appeal more to younger teenagers, but adults who occasionally read middle grade book should be pleased with the outcome of this book. I know that I will be keeping my eye out for more books by Nikki Loftin.

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Rating: : 3

Teaser Quote: "When my mom was alive, she read me stories every night. "Use your imagination, Lorelei," she'd say, "and your whole life can be a fairy tale." I wanted that to be true. But I should have paid more attention to the fairy tales.

Because not all of the children in them come out alive. And sometimes there are witches hiding in the woods."

Leah says

<http://theprettygoodgatsby.wordpress....>

2012 is the year of retellings and until now, I can't think of any other retelling of Hansel and Gretel. The moment I heard about this book, I desperately needed to read it. Luckily I was provided with an ARC (thank you, thank you, thank you!!!) and were it not for work - and, trust me, I was seriously tempted to call off - I would have finished *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* in one sitting.

Lorelei Robinson is an eleven year old girl harboring a terrible secret. Since the death of her mother a year earlier, she's felt alone and ignored by her older brother and father. And her new stepmother Molly is an absolute terror.

When her school burns down, there's talk of where to send the now-schooleless children. Over the weekend a new school suddenly is built and the only one who seems to notice just how quickly it appeared is Lorelei. Despite the costs of a private school, Lorelei's father agrees to check it out (much to the dismay of Molly; she'd much rather spend that money on herself).

Splendid Academy is unlike any other school. Not only does it have a pretty fantastic playground, but there are hardly any rules and it's nearly impossible to get in trouble. Students are free to wander the halls or leave their classroom if a particular lesson doesn't interest them. There are bowls of candy on every desk. Multiple recesses a day. Feel like playing with your phone instead of learning math? Go right ahead!

Even with these unbelievable perks, Splendid Academy's claim to fame is the food. Oh, that food. Students are encouraged to eat as much as they'd like and upon touring the school, they were asked about their favorite foods. In many cases, students eat better at school than they do at home.

The only one who seems to suspect something strange is going on is Andrew, a boy in Lorelei's class. Andrew is overweight and over the summer his mother had sent him off to camp. It was there he learned about controlling his eating and how to avoid cravings. While all the other students are stuffing their faces with plate after plate of food, Andrew is able to fight the temptation - and winds up dealing with the repercussions of going against the plans the school has for him.

Without giving too much away - although, given this book is a retelling of Hansel and Gretel, what do you think will happen? - *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* is a dark, delightful tale. I tore through this book, not just because of the quick pace, but because it was seriously *that good*. This book is described as

Hansel and Gretel meets *Coraline* and that alone should send readers running to preorder it.

The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy is the reason I love Middle Grade. :)

Sarvenaz Tash says

The sinister sweetness of Roald Dahl lives on (and I do not say that lightly) in this extraordinary book that combines fairy tale folklore with streaks of effortless originality all its own. The story is delightfully dark and deep: perfect for kids (and adults) who suspect that sometimes adults really have no idea what's going on and that it's up to kids to see the magic (and evil) right in front of them.

Claire Legrand says

I started Nikki Loftin's *THE SINISTER SWEETNESS OF SPLENDID ACADEMY* on Saturday and would have read it all in one sitting were it not for, you know, real life. As it was, I finished it in a veritable reading FRENZY both last night and this morning. I just could not put it down!

This book is, like all the best fairy tales, wildly imaginative and bone-chillingly gruesome. There were moments when my heart started pounding with the suspense of what was going to happen next! And the heroine, Lorelei, is a wonderful main character -- hilarious and strong, but hiding a terrible secret. Shocking twists and turns will keep you racing through this disturbing (and I mean that in the best possible way, as a fan of creepy children's fiction!), thrilling, and DELICIOUS tale. Who is the villain? What is REALLY going on at Splendid Academy? You won't be able to stop reading until you find out! But be warned: the food descriptions will make your mouth water and your stomach growl!

wanders off, dreaming of marzipan and French toast

Bonnie says

Tagged as 'Coraline' meets 'Hansel and Gretel' but this also reminded me a lot of 'The Witches' by Roald Dahl (in a good way!)

As of late, Middle-Grade books seem to be popping up everywhere but there have been some amazingly good ones that I never would have thought I'd be able to enjoy. This is one those stories that is perfectly suited for the younger crowd but are still a fun adventure for adults as well. Highly recommended!

This debut novel was extremely well-written and will keep any reader entranced till the end. Not just an entertaining read, this comes equipped with a deep message that I feel will be easily understood by younger readers.

In addition to the near-perfect cover, there were several pictures throughout the story that I loved.

[image error]

Considering they appear similar I would guess that the inside art was done by the same artist but I couldn't find the information to confirm. The artist to the cover though is Alexander Jansson. I would highly recommend you check out his website and view some of his other works - they're amazing!

Samantha Clark says

Quick confession, I got an early copy of this book by begging the author, who thankfully lent me one of her ARCs. How much did I like it? I can't wait until it's in stores so I can buy a copy for myself.

The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy is the kind of middle grade book that's a fun adventure, bringing readers into a world we'd like to inhabit, even if there is some spooky stuff there.

But like all good stories, this novel also tells a deeper emotional tale of a girl who's trying to deal with the death of her mother and the difficulty of accepting a new stepmother.

With a nice twist of classic fairy tales, the book describes Splendid Academy as the ultimate gingerbread house, fit to entice kids even smarter than Hansel and Gretel. Nikki builds the world brilliantly, from the thrilling playground to the food that will make mouths water. And the more serious storyline about families is weaved in wonderfully, integral to the story but not taking away from the adventure.

A fun read for kids of all ages, The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy gets a full recommendation from me. If your child is scared easily, read the book yourself first to see if it'll pass the nightmare test. But there's nothing in this book that kids won't like.

Here's a longer review: <http://bit.ly/IaLrhA>

Irene Carracher Kistler says

My class adored this book! As a read aloud, it is so much fun. The witch voices are fun to create and I loved pointing the "wand" at kids as I read the final chapter. They giggled and shrieked, so you know they loved it!

Paul Hankins says

Ask any middle grade reader about school and you might get a response along the lines of "School is tough."

But Splendid Academy is not like any other school. Here, students and faculty meet for breakfast each day, students are allowed to run from place to place, and candy dishes that never seem to empty are to be found in every desk in every room.

Education reform aside, most would agree that this would be a fantastic school to attend.

And the noun form of fantastic?

Fantasy.

So, what is happening at Splendid Academy. Why are students sitting dreamily through breakfast consuming more than a normal child could in one sitting? Sitting dreamily through lessons while consuming bottomless bowls of M&Ms? What of the mysterious Ms. Morrigan who is seemingly able to be everywhere at once? And what of the mysterious music teacher, Ms. Threnody who won't allow Lorelei to sing, forcing each of the students to learn to play a reed pipe instead?

And what of the wait staff, who never say a word while serving food or moving about the corridors? Why do some of these servers look familiar from the pictures of students who have attended the various Splendid Academies found around the world?

And why is one boy, a chubby boy named Andrew, encouraging Lorelei not to eat? And why does he choose to shove sand in her mouth on the playground risking punishment for himself?

And can any of this confusion help Lorelei to sort out her feelings about her family at home and the guilt she carries for her mother's death?

THE SINISTER SWEETNESS OF SPLENDID ACADEMY reads like Willy Wonka Meet The Wall (with a tinge of Ordinary People ((how's this for a mash-up), but tucked inside a story that reads like a classic fairy tale is something a little more tender and is not to be missed this fall by middle grade readers and their reader advisors.

Nikki Lofton gives us all of the checkpoints of a classic fairy tale:

*A family broken apart by a death and a ham-handed attempt to try to put it back together again. (Lorelei's mother passes away and she is keeping a deep, dark secret that can only be kept within the heart of a deep-feeling twelve-year-old)

*Bad things befalling characters and settings with a progressive "Wow. I didn't think that would happen" kind of feel (Father remarries, a school burns down and a new one is built immediately in its place).

*Characters are placed within a new, somewhat out-of-the-ordinary experience wherein questions must be answered quickly in order to navigate (or survive).

*Opposing forces vying for the affections of a character who doesn't quite know where their heart is at the moment let alone make decisions for its disposition.

Like a good fairy tale, some answers come quickly and the reader moves along the breadcrumb trail to try to figure out how the protagonist will navigate the conflict, but Loftin provides plenty of twists and turns within the book to keep one in the story. Her treatment of the kitchen staff is particularly tender and in this section of the book there are all kinds of extensions to familiar stories and multi-cultural lore (inviting even more reader recommendations).

And when Lorelei finally confronts the evil that she has been facing throughout the book, readers will not have predicted what needs to be faced down in order for the hero to come out on the other side.

Nikki Loftin demonstrates in this book that comfort food is anything but, and what she cooks up in THE

SINISTER SWEETNESS OF SPLENDID ACADEMY is classic fun for reading audiences.

From a reader-advisory/teacher viewpoint, middle grade fiction should have a little bit of magic within. Characters should look and sound familiar and have those tweeny-transitional concerns that are immediately recognizable by the middle grade reader. I'm of the opinion that when these middle grade titles have some natural tie-in with familiar stories (which open portals between NOW and NEXT) then so much the better for these readers.

Pair up Nikki Loftin's book with those by Jackson Pierce (SISTERS RED, SWEETLY)

Fans of 2011 titles like Anne Ursu's BREADCRUMBS, Laurel Snyder's BIGGER THAN A BREADBOX, and Patrick Ness's A MONSTER CALLS, and 2010 titles like Adam Gidwitz's A TALE DARK AND GRIMM won't want to miss Nikki Loftin's THE SINISTER SWEETNESS OF SPLENDID ACADEMY. Loftin's book will also work well with Amber McRee Turner's 2012 spring release, SWAY.

Elizabeth Meadows says

Wow! This was a fantastic book. Not only was it exciting, suspenseful, and "sinister," it covered several other topics that are relevant to middle grade readers and people of all ages. One of the underlying themes was mental health and being able to forgive yourself for something horrible. Another theme was obesity. I thought the author did a great job of showing the reality of how overweight students are treated by peers. The main character was able to display appropriate ways of dealing with it and sticking up for her friend. Another theme was family relationships. Sometimes family members don't listen to each other, but when it comes down to it, your family will be there for you.
