

A Pawn's Journey: Transforming Lives One Move at a Time

Elliott Neff

Made for Success Publishing (Oct 9, 2018)

Softcover \$16.99 (192pp)

978-1-64146-316-4

A Pawn's Journey is a compelling novel with audience improvement in mind.

Elliott Neff's lifelike self-help novel *A Pawn's Journey* uses chess strategies as a metaphor for building life skills.

The story focuses on a floundering student, April, who is trying to discover her unique talents and find a way to earn a university scholarship. Gabe, a special-needs member of the chess team who was born without arms or legs, helps his new friend learn the game and increase confidence in all aspects of her life. Also central is Cathy, a trailblazing school district enrichment programs coordinator, who supports Gabe, April, and others with unwavering wisdom, compassion, and encouragement.

Pawns, the book consistently reminds the audience, can become more powerful pieces. The rating system for chess players is also explored and demystified in this highly accessible book. Simply explained chess guidelines allow even novices to grasp a fundamental understanding of the game within the story.

As Gabe moves chess pieces with his mouth, he visibly demonstrates that adopting a can-do attitude makes even the most seemingly impossible goal achievable. Drawing from his unstoppable example, April is inspired to work on developing a robotic arm for her friend. Such plot points reinforce important messages about perseverance and overcoming even the most ominous obstacles.

The book's characters are fully realized, thanks to vivid descriptions of their personal interactions. These are enlivened with genuine emotion, as with April's shock when she earns a specially created scholarship. Natural and engaging dialogue captures dynamic scenes, like Cathy's brainstorming sessions with her husband.

Realistic plot developments showcase the intensity of chess championships, with characters holding their breath and creating a sense of immediacy. The story evolves organically, with lessons growing from each character's experiences. Their blunders are ones that can be learned from and drawn upon to make future improvements.

The book's messaging encourages girls to learn chess and explore science, technology, engineering, and math, where their participation is currently low. In keeping with the recurring theme that all students have the capacity to reach beyond their perceived limitations, the book moves logically and strategically toward its satisfying conclusion.

Prompts in the appendix focus on goal setting, healthy habits, respect, focus, sportsmanship, and more. With their help, dreams can be translated into specific and achievable plans. Reminders about the importance of shaking hands before and after chess matches and saying something nice like "have a good game" are particularly valuable takeaways from the book.

A Pawn's Journey is a novel with audience improvement in mind. Its practical applications will be beneficial for growth and improvement in business, economics, and life.

ANDREA HAMMER (October 15, 2018)

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