



Ark

Elisabeth Sharp McKetta

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Elisabeth Sharp McKetta's powerful novel *Ark* serves as a reminder that "home is where your animals are."

Arden's world is on the verge of falling apart. Her family is downsizing to a tiny home they call "the ark"; her best friend, Farah, is moving away to a new state; and her family dog is moving in with her aunt. As the world shifts to "virustime," Arden discovers that she can help make the world better by taking in homeless dogs, the first being her next-door neighbors' neglected dog. With the help of her younger brother, she navigates homeschooling and does her best to be strong for her parents, in spite of the brewing pandemic.

Before Farah leaves, she and Arden promise to write letters and keep journals to exchange when they see each other. Arden's journals make up the book's content, with its short, titled entries. But as Arden watches her parents struggle with the uncertainty surrounding the ark, she struggles to write Farah back as promised. She thinks that her problems do not measure up to her parents' or Farah's; a letter doesn't seem sufficient.

But as she navigates the "fifth grade contract" established by her father, Arden also grows up and matures, finding her place in her family and determining her purpose. Even her chore of washing dishes teaches her—in that case, that small tasks make a big difference. Indeed, each member of the family has an important role to play. And when a family member's dog needs help, Arden and Farah work together to save the day, repairing their friendship and inspiring their parents.

In the inspiring novel *Ark*, a girl helps her parents through COVID-19 while housing homeless animals.

ERIN NESBIT (September / October 2023)

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