

Charlie's Christmas Adventure

J. E. Solinski

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Charlie's Christmas Adventure is a charming novel in which four young friends come to understand what it means to love others like Jesus did.

In J. E. Solinski's delightful novel *Charlie's Christmas Adventure*, a spirited young heroine faces a host of challenges.

Charlie has a lot going on for a fifth grader. Her mother is about to give birth to a baby boy with Down syndrome; Charlie is worried that he will not be able to fit in with the other kids. Her supposed best friend, Harold, has been hanging out with Rudy instead of her. And she's navigating her blossoming friendship with Sarah, who's girly girl to Charlie's tomboy. Despite their differences, the four classmates team up for a Sunday school advent scavenger hunt. They search all over town, following clues, and learn valuable lessons about poverty, acceptance, and generosity along the way.

Following both the scavenger hunt and Charlie's discovery of a homeless encampment behind a creek, the story's parts are tied together when the hunt concludes, and its last piece is made to represent a message of love. The adults around Charlie deliver constant reminders that people's differences do not make them any less human; they encourage the children to reach out to those who seem different. Charlie and her friends take these lessons to heart, passing out blankets to homeless people in the park and making friends with elderly Ms. Harris.

Charlie is a charming lead. Though spunky, she has a softer side. She tends to speak before thinking, but makes a constant effort to become better at listening, even when doing so means that she cannot prove that she is right. Her progress is evident: she lets quiet Rudy take the lead for their project, and she agrees to step out of her comfort zone with Sarah. She struggles to accept that the world is not safe or joyous for many other people; this internal wrestling is poignant and presented in an age-appropriate manner.

The writing is descriptive, devoting time to details like characters' body language that make it more authentic. While Charlie is distressed to discover the homeless camp behind the creek, her distress leads her to feel compassion and develop a deeper understanding of Jesus's love. Her parents are strong authority figures who step in to hold her accountable when she is unkind to her siblings or when she acts out; they also allow her the room she needs to grow.

Most of the storytelling is focused on Charlie's stream of consciousness, but the narrative sometimes switches to cover Rudy and Harold's thoughts, interrupting its flow. All four children have their story lines resolved in the end, which is symbolized by the gifts that Charlie gives them.

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VIVIAN TURNBULL (April 23, 2021)

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