Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

Lucy and CeCee's How to Survive (and Thrive) in Middle School
Kimberly Dana
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Adults, preteens, and teenagers alike will find invaluable insight and information about middle school, its dangers and pleasures, in this fun and humorous book by middle-school teacher Kimberly Dana.

In *Lucy and CeCee's How to Survive (and Thrive) in Middle School*, odd couple and best friends forever (BFF) Lucy Pringle and Cecelia Cruz are seventh-grade students at Madison Heights Middle School. Having survived sixth grade, they consider themselves experts in the pitfalls and problems shared by all thirteen-year-old girls, from pimples and crushes to tough teachers and text wars. In each chapter, the girls offer their perspectives and advice on everything from "How to Get a Boyfriend" and "How to Get a Teacher to Change your Grade" to "Who Are You? Cliques and Labels" and "The Supermean Teacher (SMT)." Lucy and CeCee's diary entries are woven into each chapter, providing readers with a slice-of-life view into how the girls are actually handling (or mishandling) their own middle-school classes and crises.

Extrovert Lucy is disorganized, consistently tardy, and charming enough to have developed myriad ways to avoid schoolwork while maintaining a (barely) passing grade. Her comedic diary entries, which focus on her futile pursuit of a boy who is involved with a popular cheerleader, always begin with a horoscope and "Today's Complexion Report," which reads like a topographic map of the acne on her face. Lucy's heavy use of "tweenspeak" and text-message abbreviations fit perfectly with her optimistic personality, as does her use of an ultra-curly serif font. However, her language may prove challenging for adult readers.

Introvert CeCee is a bright perfectionist, organized in every aspect of her life, and, unsurprisingly, a straight-A student. CeCee's pithy diary entries are not dominated by tweenspeak, and they delve into more serious issues than those found in Lucy's diary, such as

her budding anorexia and the journalistic ethics of being the editor of the school newspaper when her BFF asks her not to publish information about a student uniform proposal.

Though the book is driven by a sequence of events/diary entries rather than a plot, the author manages to put the girls through breakups and breakdowns in short order, keeping the reader turning the pages to find out how each character deals with the day's crisis.

Written with the humor that only a middle-school teacher could bring to bear on the subject, the author's commonsense advice shows insight into some of the typical problems teenagers face as they navigate their hormone-driven early teen years. For example, when it becomes clear that Lucy is failing her classes, CeCee is losing control of her ability to hide her anorexia, and the two girls have a terrible fight. Dana has them meet with the school counselor, aka "the tween whisperer." As the girls unburden themselves, the counselor offers solid advice on making up and getting adult help with their problems. Unfortunately, readers never find out if CeCee conquers her eating disorder, or if Lucy is able to bring her grades up before the end of the school year.

Despite these slight shortcomings, Lucy and CeCee's guide to middle-school survival is a fast-paced, funny, and insightful book that will serve to clarify typical teen lingo and behavior for adults and give guidelines to tween and teenage kids who are having trouble navigating the middle-school milieu.

DeAnn Rossetti