

Miss Bunsen's School for Brilliant Girls: If the Hat Fits

Erica-Jane Waters

Albert Whitman (Aug 1, 2019)

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Irrepressible ten-year-olds Pearl, Halinka, and Millie are determined to save their beloved school in *Miss Bunsen's School for Brilliant Girls*, the first title in Erica-Jane Waters's lively new chapter book series. It features a trio of friends whose kindness, inner strength, and loyalty—not to mention their powerful smarts—help them solve various challenges at school and in their personal lives.

Miss Bunsen is the inspiring, eccentric, and fashionable school headmistress who asks the threesome to enter an interschool competition with a large cash prize. The goal is to invent a gadget that improves the daily life of a modern child. The girls—aided by Miss Bunsen's bionic, incontinent cat Brains—devise a magical hat, hoping to win the funds needed to make major repairs and keep their school afloat.

Lighthearted writing and whimsical illustrations create a nurturing environment where the girls are free to experiment and express themselves in a variety of media and disciplines. Science and design mingle in an appealing way, and bits of moral guidance about staying true to one's self, honesty, and dealing with jealousy and taunting are included. Miss Bunsen's School is a fun and funky environment where girls are as at ease with recommending books like *Terrific Turbines* to each other as they are whizzing up fabric on a sewing machine.

Sharper grade school readers may question why Miss Bunsen and her pupils don't focus their impressive skills on inventions that repel squirrely invaders from the premises or that creatively renovate school property, rather than their more circumnavigatory projects to raise money, but the focus here is on fun and the fantastical, so some suspension of disbelief is required. A bonus introductory chapter for the next series title promises readers a most welcome next round of fun adventures at Miss Bunsen's School.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (July/August 2019)

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