



Not My Fault

S. B. Frasca

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In the empowering novel Not My Fault, a lonely teenager uses his art to address complex issues.

In S. B. Frasca's poignant young adult novel *Not My Fault*, a teenager uses art to defend himself and others who are mistreated.

Hy is an overweight teenager with no friends. Despite his best efforts to go unnoticed, he seems to draw the constant attention of his school's bullies. He finds some support from his mother; from Mr. Sanchez, his art teacher; and from Mr. Fadikar, a local convenience store owner. However, Hy's main solace is his art, which he uses to express himself in ways he cannot do out loud.

When Hy witnesses customers harassing and using bigoted language toward Mr. Fadikar, he is inspired to spray-paint a park's band shell with "not my fault," written in Hindi. Then Mr. Sanchez is targeted for being gay; an offensive message is painted on his classroom door. Drawing on his now-burgeoning "not my fault" mantra, Hy covers the hateful message with his own encouraging design.

The book takes a broad stand against prejudice, relating this message to Hy's personal experiences. Hy's growing popularity in the art world is also focal; his work is anonymous, and he's fearful of being found out and punished. At the same time, his relationships with others become more complicated: he forms bonds with people outside of his typical social circle, including a wealthy older girl who is dealing with a situation that's too big for Hy to resolve and a popular athlete grappling with his own sense of identity. These connections with other teenagers help Hy to develop a better sense of self-worth.

However, the book's scenes involving other people's troubles become repetitive. The novel's pace slows as Hy adds more people's issues to his plate. Furthermore, little time is devoted to resolving these conflicts once they're introduced; though they're consequential to understanding the book's cast, there's little sense of how the issues they're facing will impact them long-term. Instead, Hy's growth is prioritized.

The book's conclusion is rushed through; it condenses the book's central conflict too much in order to proffer a solution. Further, an individual who influences this climax is underdeveloped. Indeed, the only true resolution concerns Hy's final understanding of who he is.

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GAIL HOFFER-LOIBL (June 26, 2023)

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