

Pippa Park Raises Her Game

Erin Yun

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In Erin Yun's enchanting *Pippa Park Raises Her Game*, a girl starts a new school and tries to reinvent her image.

Pippa's mom lives in Korea, so her older sister Mina is raising her, though the sisters don't always get along. Pippa loves basketball; Mina doesn't quite understand its importance and would rather Pippa focus more on math. She bans Pippa from the sport and gets her a private student tutor, Eliot.

Shortly after starting their lessons, Pippa receives a scholarship to a private school, which she suspects Eliot had something to do with. It comes on the condition that she play basketball and maintain a 3.0 GPA. Embarrassed that she needs a scholarship, Pippa lets everyone around her think that she's different than she is. She tries to maintain her grades, her friendships, and her secrets in the hopes of fitting in and beating the rival basketball team, which happens to be her former team.

Pippa narrates and relates sympathetic struggles, wondering about how to talk to the boy she likes and how to fit in with the cool kids. Even when she's unsure of herself, she acts in accordance with what she believes is right. She learns from her mistakes in a way that is endearing.

The story moves between locations as varied as the school lunchroom and the laundromat. The Korean food that Mina's husband cooks is mouthwateringly detailed. Scenes of conflict play out in real time and hold attention, moving toward a cathartic end in which relationships are healed and Pippa's basketball skills are put to use.

Pippa Park Raises Her Game is an exciting middle grade novel about middle school struggles and feeling out of place.

REBECCA MONTERUSSO (March / April 2020)

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