

Squint

Chad Morris

Shelly Brown

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Chad Morris and Shelly Brown's *Squint* pulls off the seemingly impossible: it is an empathy-building novel with a message that's fun to read.

Thirteen-year-old Flint lives with his grandparents and wears special glasses that don't entirely correct his limited vision. Coolness is out of the question; he is inevitably nicknamed Squint.

Flint is also an aspiring comic book artist hoping to enter an important competition. When McKell, a girl who usually hangs out with a cooler crowd, sits down beside him and strikes up a conversation, his life begins to change.

Flint is a sharply observant narrator. He is self-deprecatingly humorous rather than self-pitying, and he easily embodies the secret freakishness that many teens feel. He discovers that seemingly perfect McKell has problems of her own, too: her father works a lot, her mother is depressed, and her brother Danny has progeria, an extremely rare disease that he copes with by maintaining a website that focuses on the positive.

Despite the book's dual medical issues, this is not a "sick kid" book. Flint is familiar, only with a different set of problems than most, and while Danny's story line is more serious, it sends a strong message about making the most of what you have. The writing is perfectly tuned, trusting its audience enough not to hammer at its main themes. One of the book's most memorable features is Flint's comic book-in-progress, whose story subtly reflects what's going on in Flint's life and whose art, which is intriguingly described, is fun to imagine.

With its sophisticated themes and thoroughly likable main character, *Squint* takes on a lot and delivers beyond expectations.

SUSAN WAGGONER (November/December 2018)

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