



The Climate Diaries: Book One: The Academy

Aaron Arsenault

Adrienn Harto, Illustrator

FriesenPress

(300pp)

978-1-73832-270-1

Gifted children gather, preparing to fight together against climate change, in the exciting novel The Climate Diaries.

In Aaron Arsenault's entertaining adventure novel *The Climate Diaries*, a capable boy joins a secretive group to help reverse environmental damage.

Jax is a genius with a reputation for frequent detentions. He's passionate about researching climate change and would rather be writing in his notebooks than enduring the fifth grade. Determined to end his last day of elementary school with a flourish, he devises a few pranks that showcase his impish nature and computer savviness. But one antic goes too far and risks landing him in juvenile detention. Instead, a pair of Climate Action Taskforce (CAT) agents recruit him for an international academy to help their cause.

While the book's adults are cartoonishly indignant over Jax's habit of challenging authority, Jax himself is endearing. He displays classic gifted traits: he's focused on his special interest to a high degree yet also prone to immature impulses; he's out of step with his peers and relishes being surrounded by adults who share in his goals. His characterization is imbued with action-hero flair: he can scale rooftops, and he's depicted with wild hair. Still, he evades real consequences because of convenient timing, and some of the book's developments are too abrupt to be believable.

Beyond Jax, the cast is rounded out by other recruits, including a brusque girl who prides herself on being a second-year CAT member; a good-natured, peace-making Australian who is fond of yoga; and a Canadian "nerd" whose mother is a brain surgeon. They are developed in somewhat broad terms, though, and there's some stereotyping based on nationality that flattens the text: the Australian's speech is peppered with colloquialisms including "mate"; the Canadian exhibits continual politeness. But their dynamics are prickly enough to hold interest, and when details about their families are revealed during a clandestine drone flight, they come to seem more real.

When it comes to CAT headquarters and future plans, the novel is quite cinematic. There's an oceanside helipad, futuristic research elements, and a nature preserve to pique interest. For the audience, as for Jax, the academy is fun to explore. Indeed, educational concepts, as with those related to sustainable agroforestry, are introduced in an engaging way through Jax's first experiences with the academy. But Jax's growth is ultimately shortchanged: his self-awareness about how his behavior affects others arrives because of dramatic twists, not in a natural way. Still, with its background tension set in motion via a missing climatologist and threats from shadowy figures, this is a fascinating start to a science-minded series.

In the series-opening adventure novel *The Climate Diaries*, exceptional children train to fight for the planet, learning to work together in the meantime.

KAREN RIGBY (May 9, 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.