

The Great Chocolate War

Bekki House

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Alex is nervous about starting third grade. His brother, Ben, has warned him about the war between Mrs. Harper's and Mrs. Sherman's third graders—the great chocolate war. Ben tells Alex little else about the war, so Alex is left to anxiously analyze the activities of each school day wondering why, if, and when the chocolate war will begin. One day Alex breaks down at school and explains his fears to Mrs. Harper who assuages them by giving Alex the facts about the great chocolate war.

Author Bekki House has created a story that contains valuable, age-appropriate lessons about the anxiety that often accompanies new adventures and the importance of confronting and working through fear. However, the text contains many general statements such as “I enjoy music class,” “he seems to be lost in thought too,” or “each day I feel more comfortable.” This lack of adjectives and adverbs results in a story that isn't rich enough to fully capture and hold the attention of the reader or listener. Overall, it simply is too generalized.

The Great Chocolate War features ten double-page spreads. White text appears on the left side of the spread and is set against a chocolate brown background, and the illustrations are on the right side. Unfortunately, the result is not visually appealing due to the imbalance created by the large illustrations and the usually small amount of text. In addition, the organization of the paragraphs appears to be random, so there is no clear story line. There are also numerous typos throughout the book.

The color illustrations by Ivy Mari Apa depict characters whose facial expressions are evocative. And while the simple illustrations do depict the content of the text, they have no unique qualities that make them stand out in terms of style or color. The illustrations lack depth and richness, and the areas of blank background are ineffective.

Though there is some promise in the story's premise, *The Great Chocolate War* needs to be edited, the story refined, and the format improved.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (May 17, 2012)

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