

The Undercover Book List

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In *The Undercover Book List*, two twelve-year-olds forge a friendship based on their serendipitous connection to a library book.

Jane is a self-professed book nerd. When her best friend, Sienna, a fellow reader, moves away, she suggests the Undercover Book List to ease Jane's loneliness. The idea is to leave an anonymous note in a designated library book and strike up a friendship with whoever finds it.

Tyson is a video game-loving jokester whose antics tend to land him in the principal's office. He is discouraged by his bad grades, but feels helpless to change them. By accident, he sees Jane slipping her note into the library book; he leaves an anonymous response. What begins as a prank leads to an awakening: Tyson develops a better sense of who he really is, leading to a triumph for him and Jane.

The book's narration alternates between Jane and Tyson's points of view, exploring themes of transformation, and of the strength it takes to embrace change. Tyson and Jane learn that change brings strength, too, once it's been embraced. Their transformations are fast: both exhibit understandings of human psychology of the sort that eludes many adults. The obstacles they face, including vandalism and illness, are handled in a straightforward manner, but without sacrificing emotion (though a story line concerning a classroom activity is unresolved). Both strong Jane and sensitive Tyson prove to be excellent role models by the book's gratifying ending.

In the diverse novel *The Undercover Book List*, two classmates overcome their initial antagonism to find commonalities, which lead them to unexpected solidarity.

RANDI HACKER (November / December 2021)

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