

What the Wind Can Tell You

Sarah Marie A. Jette

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A heartwarming, magical middle-grade novel, Sarah Marie A. Jette's *What the Wind Can Tell You* tackles tough issues with sensitivity.

Twelve-year-old Isabelle wants to harness the power of wind for her science fair project. She enlists the assistance of her brother, Julian, who is severely epileptic and uses a wheelchair. His silent smiles and thumbs-ups encourage her resourceful experiments until a particularly bad seizure limits his responses further.

When she enters his enchanting world of Las Brisas, a place where Julian can say and do whatever he pleases, Isabelle's determination and belief in her brother grow stronger, as do the worries of her protective parents. This is a simultaneously realistic, supernatural, and touching look at the dynamics of families and disabilities.

Julian's severe epilepsy and resulting physical disabilities are dealt with masterfully. While at first the dream world of Las Brisas is a magical place that Julian and Isabelle explore together without his using a wheelchair, by the end, reality becomes just as magical as Las Brisas. This is an important point for the book to make: that wheelchair-using Julian can still experience many of the things that Las Brisas Julian can.

Characters, even minor ones, are engaging, and their "special powers"—Isabelle's mother and aunt can accurately recall times and dates, for instance—give dimension and a lighthearted quality to the substantial plot.

Isabelle's father's power (he eats copious amounts of food quickly) is often fun but is balanced by the recognition that he often stress-eats and has terrible stomachaches. Every aspect of the novel is carefully thought out, and it makes for a remarkable and enjoyable read.

Aspects of Mexican American culture and literary tropes add depth and distinction in this novel. Prejudice and racism are skillfully woven into the fabric of the story through Isabelle's grandfather, who also has hesitations about considering Julian more than an unfortunate and abnormal boy.

This thoughtful and lively novel will delight middle-grade ages and beyond with its balance of sensory prose and meaningful topics.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (May/June 2018)

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