



Wishes, Dares, & How to Stand Up to a Bully

Darlene Beck-Jacobson

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In Darlene Beck-Jacobson's poignant novel in verse, *Wishes, Dares, & How to Stand Up to a Bully*, a boy copes with the absence of his father, who is missing in action during the Vietnam War.

Eleven-year-old Jack, with his mother and his sister, Katy, spends the summer at his grandparents' home. When he and Katy catch a one-eyed fish, they see it as lucky; they make a wish on it to have pancakes for dinner. When the wish comes true, they wonder if the fish really is magical.

Jack relates the incident to his friend, Jill, who decides to catch the fish again. She wishes that her bully of a brother, Cody, would leave them alone, but her wish has different results. Meanwhile, Jack reads his father's childhood diary, hoping that it contains clues about what makes a good wish so that he can make the perfect one and bring his father home. Discussions about wishes overlay the ways that the children work through their complicated situations.

Its free verse lines crafted with care and concision, the book captures Jack's emotions, and his 1960s small town setting, because of its sharp attention to detail. References to John F. Kennedy, John Glenn, and Joe DiMaggio round out the period, and the shadow of the war hangs over everything. Still, the children roam unsupervised—fishing, biking, and camping—in a world that is otherwise familiar and safe. They're dealing with serious issues all the while, from Jill and Cody's abusive stepfather to Jack and Katy missing their father. By the end, they have all developed the courage and strength to deal with their struggles.

A historical childhood fantasy in verse, *Wishes, Dares, & How to Stand Up to a Bully* blends light summer fun with deep emotional challenges.

CATHERINE THURESON (March / April 2020)

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