

Umbrella Summer

Lisa Graff

Reviewed by: Sophia Cheng, Age 16

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Everyone tells Annie that she is worrying too much, that she is being too careful and that she is no fun to be around anymore. However, Annie prefers to see herself as being cautious. In her opinion, there is nothing wrong with arming herself with a stash of band-aids, both on herself and in its packaged form, and riding her bike at an agonizingly slow pace with ice bandages around her ankles and a complete set of safety gear. Still, these are only the precautions she takes when riding her bike. Everything Annie does is paired up in her mind with a number of likely illnesses she thinks she may have. Therefore, to Annie, sacrificing the small joys in life is better than the alternative- death by some rare, obscure disease or easily preventable accident.

Annie was not always obsessed with her health. It is only after her brother Jared's unexpected death has Annie been assailed with a downpour of imaginary illnesses. Moreover, it is not until the kindly new neighbor, Mrs. Finch, enters Annie's life that Annie is forced to acknowledge the umbrella under which she has constructed and hidden herself. Together, Mrs. Finch and Annie make a joint effort to confront the barriers set up by the deaths of their loved ones, and take a peek into the sunlight and all life has to offer them on the other side.

Umbrella Summer by Lisa Graff is a heart-warming novel that takes its readers on a journey through a healing process that overcomes the lingering effects of death through life. The generally upbeat tone and relaxed pace contribute to the book being both uplifting and enjoyable to read. And underlying the overall lightness of the story are touching themes presented through the actions of the characters whose distinct personalities are crucial to the plotline. In addition, Annie seems to have plenty to say about everything, remarking on everyone, but herself. By the end of the book, Annie's neighborhood has been well detailed out, and her personality can be captured early on. However, she doesn't spare the time to describe herself physically aside from comparing her hair color to the dirt in a compost bin. It is like seeing the world painted through her eyes, but not being able to see the main character herself. Nevertheless, the gentle humor, bold characters, and touching story are more than enough to shine through and bring some sunlight into anyone's heart.

As opposed to a heart-stopping, intensely suspenseful story, *Umbrella Summer* smoothly flows through a sequence of events recounted in a way that eliminates the need for plot twists and action-filled scenes. Although the intended audience is most likely the upper elementary and middle school age range, it is a short novel that should appeal to all age groups. In addition to this book, I also recommend these books, which are similar to this one: *A Crooked Kind of Perfect* by Linda Urban, *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata, and *Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul* by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen.