

Smile

Raina Telgemeier

Reviewed by: Ella Gohari, 12 years old

Star Teen Reviewer of the Be The Star You Are! Charity

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Smile, the first book in Raina Telgemeier's autobiographical graphic novel series, follows protagonist Raina herself through sixth grade to tenth. After an accident causes Raina to severely injure her two front teeth, she must navigate through middle school and high school learning that boys are not the nicest, friends can be enemies, and that she should never stray too far from who she is. Throughout the story, I felt myself wanting to reach out and comfort Raina, because she goes through many tough situations, both physically and emotionally. The author herself describes this story as a "dental drama", and I agree with this description wholeheartedly. From going in and out of surgery, braces, retainers, and headgear, this book is sure to resonate with anyone who has dealt with some sort of embarrassing tooth problem in their lives. Even if you do not have that to relate to, the situations that Raina faces are common for most teenage girls: boy trouble, friend drama, and even a natural disaster all make their way into the book.

One of the main things I liked about this graphic novel are all the jokes Raina Telgemeier managed to put in. Even in serious parts, Raina was able to make fun of herself at that age, which is something that many cannot do. She acknowledges that sometimes, the things middle schoolers and high schoolers do are not logical, but instead of sulking about it, she is able to twist it into something enjoyable and funny. Another thing I find interesting is how realistic this story is. She was able to channel her past self and pour it into this novel. Raina Telgemeier also revealed how she got interested in drawing. It shows from the amazing pictures on each page that she is passionate about what she does.

The main theme of this story is coming of age and accepting who you are, and time and time again, the book reinforced this. By the end of the story, Raina is a changed person, both physically because of her teeth but emotionally too. She realizes what she loves, what she hates, and that some people are not worth her time- and that is okay! I really enjoyed following Raina's story from age eleven to age sixteen, and I could relate to most of the struggles she faced. At first glance, this graphic novel may seem like a heavy read with 233 pages, but because it is a graphic novel, it is actually much shorter. Still, even though it has less words than other books, the pictures tell most of the story, which is why words are not necessary.

I recommend this story as a gift for people ages 10-14 who are getting braces, feeling left out, or just want a good read. It is a definite must read! If you liked this book, I suggest reading the sequel to this one, Sisters, or anything else by Raina Telgemeier!