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Children and Young Adult Book Review *Elementary to Middle School* El Deafo

Student Reviewer: Ivy Hadley
Educator Reviewer: Soojin Ahn



Bell, C. (2014). *El deafo*. New York, NY: Abrams Publishing.

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Pages: 248

Student Review:

This book is the story of a girl named Cece, who gets very sick with spinal meningitis and eventually has to get hearing aids because she loses her hearing. She gets an advanced hearing aid called the Phonic Ear, which works when her teacher hangs a microphone around her neck and speaks into it. Cece realizes that she can hear the teacher, wherever she is, even in the bathroom! She is very excited about her new power, and gives herself a new nickname... *El Deafo*!

I liked this book because I think it was a very well written book, and it was about the author's own childhood. It was a very interesting graphic novel, and my brothers thought so also, because they kept trying to steal it! I thought it was very cute that the characters were drawn as rabbits, and I think that giving herself a superhero nickname was adorable. Overall, I would recommend this book to friends and family, because it is funny, charming, and intellectual.

Ivy Hadley

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7th Grade

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Educator Review:

The cover of this book is eye-catching because it shows a flying hero with two huge rabbit ears. This rabbit has a special connection to the author, because this book is a graphic novel about the author's life as a hearing-impaired school child. The two huge ears might represent the author's dearest wish to hear more from the world and other people.

In terms of plot, Cece Bell portrayed herself as a rabbit-like girl, and she illustrated her school days from kindergarten to 5th grade. She showed how she first went to school, moved to another school, learned American Sign Language with the help of a hearing aid (the Phonic Ear), and met friends and teachers. In her school life, having a good friendship was the most important issue since that was the way she could connect herself to the outside world. Therefore, each chapter consists of an episode about her relationship with some fellow students in her grade; she includes both good and bad memories in these scenes.

The last two chapters are the most thematic ones, because the author's dream to become a kids' superhero came true. She was able to help her classmates have a little fun by using her special aid's function to track her teacher out of the classroom. At this moment, her special aid became not a burden or shame to her anymore. This is why the rabbit on the cover is flying wearing a superman-style cape. She finally realized that being deaf was not a disability, and the other kids at school also realized that she was just like them.

Just like Cece's various friends and their relationships with Cece, many people may not know how to be friends with those who are a little different from them. Those differences could include physical, cultural, character, or language differences. To young children, it may be more difficult because school or a classroom might be the first time they meet different people beyond their family. Some students might make mistakes such as treating a person perceived as different with special treatment, ignorance, misunderstanding, or carelessness, so some students might get hurt from others' mistakes. This story is about the author's experience as a special child, but any child can relate this story to his or her own experience in school. Readers will realize that this special child must be just the same as everyone else. That is a very simple, but important lesson of this book.

This book is a graphic novel, so it would be very interesting and easy to read even for kindergarten students. However, some technical terms and expressions about the disease and hearing aids are advanced, so parents or adult educators might need to explain some aspects to children. Also, for readers who are not familiar with American schools or the American peer culture, an educators' description may help provide context for the story.

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