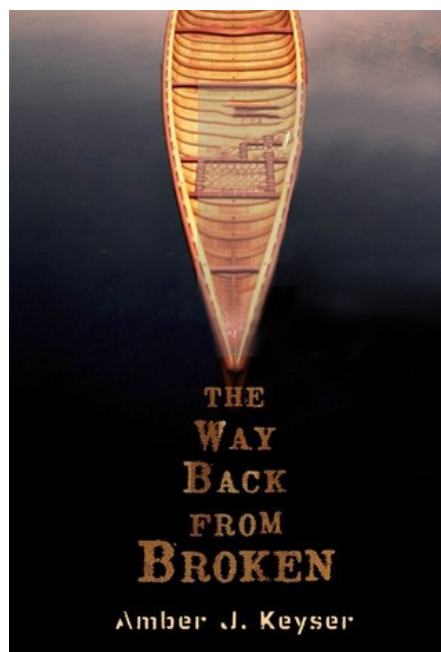


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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Children and Young Adult Book Review *High School* **The Way Back from Broken**

Student Reviewer: Eveliyn Martinez
Educator Reviewer: Helene Halstead



Keyser, A. (2015). *The way back from broken*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Lab, a division of Lerner Publishing Company.

ISBN: 978-1467775908

Pages: 216

Student Review:

This book was about a boy in high school named Rakmen who lost his baby sister. His little sister died in his arms. Also, this book is about how he goes camping and starts to think about death and what his parents are going through.

This book tells the story of how the main character deals with his own thoughts. He is going through a bad time and because he has time to think about it while he is camping, he will know how to deal with hard times later in life. Readers will be interested because of the mystery. It is difficult to predict what will happen and this makes you want to keep reading. You will want to know what happens to him and what he thinks about.

People who are going through hard times will enjoy this book. They might learn something from what the main character is going through. This might make them feel calmer about their own situation.

The Way Back from Broken made me think differently about how to work with my own thoughts.

Evelyn Martinez
Clarke Central High School, Athens, GA
9th Grade

*The Way Back from
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Educator Review:

The title of Keyser's first novel, *The Way Back From Broken*, provides the reader with a general sense of the plot. At first one might wonder why they should pick up a book if the storyline is known before they remember that, generally, young adult novels are about how teens cope with specific challenging events. We remember that as we read, the characters become our models and our conduits for our own emotional outlets. And this is what Keyser does well; the draw of this book lies in the vivid details that place the reader in the story. It is not just our main character, Rakmen Cannon, and ten year old Jacey Tatlas and her mother who take this journey; we go along with them, dealing with our own challenges and sufferings.

The Way Back From Broken tells the story of high school student Rakmen, his teacher and his teacher's young daughter. Rakmen's infant sister has died in his arms before our story begins and he fears for his parents' marriage. His father deals with his grief by ignoring it and his mother drags Rakmen to a support group designed for parents and siblings. Rakmen knows it is only a matter of time before his family further unravels.

For ten months, Rakmen has gone to The Promise House. The parents, well the moms, sit upstairs while the children paint through their feelings in art therapy in the musty basement. While he looks forward to seeing his friend Molly, the girl who makes his heart skip, he dreads the "group scab picking" (p. 2) that forces him to confront the feelings he would rather bury. One rainy night, Rakmen is surprised to see his teacher, Mrs. Tatlas, and her daughter Jacey come into the center. Rakmen could not tell if the water on his teacher's face was the rain or her tears. He learns that the dreams of the smiling pregnant teacher who left his school months before was not the same woman before him now. He sees his own mother's grief in her eyes and understands what has happened; he takes Jacey downstairs to join the group.

As Jacey grows to rely on Rakmen while her mom grows distant and tries to cope with her grief, Rakmen finds himself answering questions he does not want to think about. Mrs. Tatlas also finds herself trusting Rakmen;

when she decides that she needs to search out solitude and return to a cabin she frequented in her past, she takes Rakmen with her to help with Jacey. It is on this trip that things fall apart and are put back together. This book does not shy from the topic of death. It dives deep into the sorrow of loss, guilt and trying to find normal. We plunge into the grief with the characters and contemplate our own losses as we read. We take on Rakmen's cynicism and Jacey's optimism, treading on water as we read each page.

Keyser does a lovely job with her debut novel. It will provide teens a chance to understand how others process grief and that when you return to normalcy; you are both the same and a new person. Young adults will enjoy the tension of the camping trip-gone-wrong and will root for each character to be a survivor. They will return to these pages when they think about their own sorrows and know that it is possible to continue.

Helene Halstead
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