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Review of *Sincerely, Harriet*

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Adult/Educator Reviewer: Brandy N. Pass

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Student Reviewer: Ashton Morrison, 12th Grade



Searle, S. W. (2019). *Sincerely, Harriet*. Minneapolis, MN: Graphic Universe.

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Adult Review: Brandy N. Pass

Harriet Flores is uprooted from her home and moved to Chicago, far from everything familiar – including her friends. She feels alone and isolated in her new town all while trying to cope with an unseen illness. Her parents are working long hours to accommodate her mounting doctor bills and the expenses of living in town, leaving Harriet with little but her imagination to fill those hours. Harry, as she’s affectionately known, drums up stories about non-existent friendships – though she truly wishes they could come to fruition – murderous neighbors, and potentially crazy postal workers. She eventually befriends Pearl, the elderly woman on the first floor, who opens her eyes to the silent struggles many people face and ultimately shows Harriet how to brave her seemingly dire situation through communication.

This book will certainly appeal to middle and high school students for both the content and graphics. Harriet’s character is navigating a silent, and seemingly lonely, battle, just as many students in today’s society. She attempts many avenues of facing her battle, even facing some dark places in her journey. She envisions how others like her deal with the isolation; she creates imagined friendships; she even creates false characteristics for those she has never met to help fill the void of relationships. Harriet eventually realizes that talking to someone and letting her family in seems to be the best way to cope. It is common for youth to feel isolated – as if nobody could possibly understand what they are facing. *SINCERELY, Harriet* exposes the reality that many people, young and old, experience these spirits. Young adults would certainly find a connection with Harriet and her inaudible battles. In the end, readers may find courage to seek their own support systems.

Overall, this book would work well in a classroom setting to open discussion about relationships and hardships. However, there is a brief moment in the text that alludes to suicide and would need to be

addressed appropriately. Harriet does not attempt suicide but does wonder for a moment about that end. It is subtle enough that it should not alarm school leaders or parents, but obvious enough that it should be covered.

Student Review: Ashton Morrison

SINCERELY, Harriet is an inspiring story about overcoming both physical limitations and social hurdles. Harriet is a character that readers can sympathize with and relate to as her story is presented, displaying that she is a normal girl with rational wants and needs. However, the sympathy comes in when it is revealed that Harriet isn’t completely normal as she suffers from Multiple Sclerosis. This becomes a strong aspect of the story as the author shows that even though Harriet is a victim of this disease and is subject to all its detriments, she is able to overcome those difficulties and lead a happy life in the end. The social hurdles that she encounters are both common and unique as they can coincide with her disease. She faces shyness, which any readers, both young and old can relate to, along with more complex issues that make her question her social capability. The author explores these emotions and struggles through Harriet, making her human, which is a powerful skill held by the author and an important part of understanding the character for the readers.

The pictures within the graphic novel are what make up the story both literally and figuratively. The art within is attractive to all sorts of readers with its simplistic style, while still being able to convey complex emotion on the faces of characters such as Pearl’s disappointment with Harriet at times. The imagery used can be very descriptive and show the readers unspoken character traits by utilizing small details visible to the readers, such as the earrings her parents wear. More obvious images shown to the

readers can be equally informative, such as the books that Harriet likes. This is a story for all those

that enjoy the bright and sunny combined with a healthy dose of impactful realism.