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Paper Things



Synopsis

When forced to choose between staying with her guardian and being with her big brother, Ari chose her big brother. There's just one problem—Gage doesn't actually have a place to live. When Ari's mother died four years ago, she had two final wishes: that Ari and her older brother, Gage, would stay together always, and that Ari would go to Carter, the middle school for gifted students. So when nineteen-year-old Gage decides he can no longer live with their bossy guardian, Janna, Ari knows she has to go with him. But it's been two months, and Gage still hasn't found them an apartment. He and Ari have been "couch surfing," staying with Gage's friend in a tiny apartment, crashing with Gage's girlfriend and two roommates, and if necessary, sneaking into a juvenile shelter to escape the cold Maine nights. But all of this jumping around makes it hard for Ari to keep up with her schoolwork, never mind her friendships, and getting into Carter starts to seem impossible. Will Ari be forced to break one of her promises to Mama? Told in an open, authentic voice, this nuanced story of hiding in plain sight may have readers thinking about homelessness in a whole new way.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 4—This gentle depiction of homelessness follows Arianna Hazard, a fifth grader who bounces between friends' couches and a shelter while struggling to hide her situation

from classmates. Ari and her beloved 18-year-old brother Gage live with Jana, a caring but strict foster parent, until Gage decides they should strike out on their own. He plans to find them an apartment; when that doesn't work out, Ari and Gage spend months staying with Gage's girlfriend or buddies, or sneaking into a juvenile shelter on nights when couch surfing isn't an option. Ari has many of the same concerns as her other fifth grade classmates—getting a leadership role at her school, finishing her homework on time, maintaining her friendships—but her living situation makes everything more difficult. Ari's friendships are strained, and her grades slip as she tries to navigate homelessness. Everything becomes challenging, from personal hygiene to getting to school on time. Since her mother's death four years ago (her soldier father was killed before Ari was born), Ari has hoped to fulfill her mother's dream and go to Carter Middle School, a school for gifted students. However, the dip in her grades—and a detention for trying to revive elementary school traditions against the principal's wishes—may ruin her chances. Ari finds comfort in a "family" cut out from catalogs, her "paper things." This novel will engender empathy and understanding of a serious and all-too-real problem. Jacobson's story is poignant but never preachy. While the ending won't come as a surprise to many readers, this is a sweet and touching portrayal of a resilient young girl.

—Miranda Doyle, Lake Oswego School District, OR --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This novel will engender empathy and understanding of a serious and all-too-real problem. Jacobson's story is poignant but never preachy. School Library Journal (starred review) Jacobson elevates her book beyond "problem novel" territory with an engaging narrator who works hard to be loyal to her brother—and to her mother's memory. Small moments pack big emotional wallops... A tender exploration of homelessness. Publishers Weekly Powerful... It is well written, with a moving plot, and is told in an authentic voice that pulls the reader in. ... Jacobson tells a story that is authentic and relatable to a wide audience of readers. This novel is a definite must-purchase for a library's collection. VOYA Ari's plight vividly illustrates the myriad consequences of homelessness, and the adults around her who should be picking up on the numerous clues to her situation seem oblivious. Her perceptive first-person voice neatly captures her conflicted loyalty to Gage but also to Janna, as well as her valiant attempts to make an impossible situation work out. ... A thoughtful and moving exploration of homelessness. Kirkus Reviews In this poignant view of one child's experience with homelessness, Jacobson deftly shows how easily it can happen, an insidious downward spiral with heart-wrenching consequences. The Horn Book Through Ari's resiliency, Jacobson

introduces readers to the precarious and frightening life of a homeless elementary-school student who holds fast to her dreams and the only family she knows. It is her mature sense of her own needs that informs the adults who love her and helps them to understand how they might build a future together. •BooklistPaper Things treats honesty, compassion and generosity as things we can never have too much of in life. Here's hoping it inspires more of the same in its readers. •BookPageAri's struggle to stay afloat as the bottom drops out of her world is compelling...readers will be glad to see her successfully negotiate her divided loyalties and find a safe home. •Bulletin of the Center for Children's BooksJacobson's realistic fiction novel provides a rich context for dialogue about recognizing the signs of homelessness and providing resources to students and families. •Literacy Daily

It was a good book, but nothing extraordinary. I didn't really like the main character, which didn't help. I did however admire her choice in the end of the book. I was happy then that she finally got the help she needed. Making up with her friend was another thing I felt like she needed to do, and was glad when she finally did. Her whole paper family kind of confused me, and I wonder why that was included in the book at seemingly random times. Overall not bad, but not great either.

Interesting story for tweens about an 11 year old who becomes homeless, and overcomes adversity with grace and intelligence.

My kids had to read this for school, they didn't love it, but they didn't hate it either.

Excellent book! I highly recommend it for all middle school students and adults as well.

I wish I could give this more stars. The writing is done well, and the storytelling is very good. The characters are developed nicely and are believable, but I found the story to be rather boring and I had a hard time staying with it. It was just incredibly slow for me. A young girl might like it, especially one who could sympathize with Ari, the main character. I like books with a little more action. This book is basically about a little girl who is just trudging through life hoping to get into a special school, but due to her life's circumstances, is afraid she won't make it. I really didn't see her making much of an effort actually. This book was just okay for me.

Eleven-year-old Ari Hazard's mom made her two children promise before she died that they would

stay together. Since their father is also dead, Ari and her older brother, Gage, have been staying with their guardian, Janna, a former family friend, but after Gage claims he has an apartment, Janna lets Ari move out and join her brother. The only problem is that Gage is homeless and relying on shelters and friends to crash, though he's planning on getting a job and an apartment as soon as he can. Ari, who is currently worried about getting into a private school (a family tradition), wants to stay with her brother, but finds herself struggling to keep up with schoolwork after she leaves Janna's and also stay close to her best friend Sasha, while still keeping her living arrangements a secret. Ari has also teamed up with a classmate, Daniel, in order to try and bring back some of the abolished fun school traditions before they all graduate. But putting herself in the spotlight while doing that may also wind up revealing her secret - and jeopardizing her next year's admittance to school. I think this book's plot would have worked better in the era before social media, helicopter parenting, and people being in contact with each other 24-7. The reader is meant to accept that a child, whose entire family has attended the school, goes from being a popular honor student to seriously struggling and so unkempt that she's ostracized - and no one at the school or the other parents cares enough to notice and intervene? The guardian stops out of the blue paying for the child's hot lunch plan and volunteering, and not a single administrator, parent or friend reaches out to find out what the heck is going on? The guardian supposedly cares about Ari, but she doesn't bother to update the school in case of an emergency of the girl's new "home"? None of Ari's other friends care enough either to probe - and we're supposed to believe she was well-liked before all this occurred? This may be nitpicking to some, but this string of implausibility just made the book - though it's well-written and has engaging characters - too hard to swallow.

I am an adult who reads children's book as I find a lot of gems in the genre. I was also an orphan myself who kicked around homes of family and church members until I was emancipated at 16. I like to test out books on orphans for a feel of authenticity based upon my experiences. This book succeeds on all counts. The fine nuances of Ari's memories, her possessions which she takes with her and her desires to maintain her friends, her goals and her memories were beautifully portrayed. I like that Jacobson shows the struggle to hold on to a life despite living a way that is so different than everyone else's. I thought this was a very remarkable story, age appropriate, that could definitely serve both children facing parental loss as well as friends who want insight. It of course does not reflect everyone's experience but I liked the genuine feel to the story. There are a lot of orphan themed books in the children's and fantasy/YA market right now. This is the best I have read. Nice work, highly recommended.

Ari is a fifth-grader who dreams to go to Carter Middle School just like her family did. But Ari's situation isn't exactly normal. Her mother died four years ago wishing that Ari and her older brother Gage stay together always. But now that Gage is nineteen, he decides he can no longer live with their guardian, Aunt Janna. Ari decides to leave with Gage, but after two months, Gage still hasn't found an apartment for the two of them. Instead, they have been staying with whoever is willing to take them in. All of this "couch surfing" is taking its toll on Ari's schoolwork, cleanliness, and friendships. Can this situation go on forever? Or will Ari be forced to make a tough decision and break her mother's dying wish? Ari is a strong character who does not even realize she is homeless at first. As Gage and Ari's situation develops, Ari discovers a strength she never knew she had and opens up to the people around her. In the book PAPER THINGS, Author Jennifer Richard Jacobson reveals a whole new perspective on homelessness. It is not just what we see on the streets of big cities, homelessness is so much more. How many children in our schools are in situations like Ari? Books are mirrors, reflecting our own lives; and windows, showing us the lives of others. PAPER THINGS would be an excellent addition to any classroom/school library.

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