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Review: Counting by 7s

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Counting by 7s

By Holly Goldberg Sloan

Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin Young Readers Group, 2013

DESCRIPTION:

Arriving home in the car of her guidance counselor, Willow Chance (noting herself as “a person of color”), accompanied by two Vietnamese students, discovers a police car in her driveway. Her life is not only radically altered, but the lives of those with her are, also. The police are there to inform Willow that both her parents have been killed in an automobile accident, and to seek out any non-existing relatives. For all practical purposes, the twelve-year-old is completely alone in the world. Thus, her story begins. What ensues is the heart-wrenching, yet victorious metamorphoses of a creatively gifted child, somewhat obsessive-compulsive, to a leader in a community of helpers--the fatherless family of a Vietnamese nail entrepreneur, a Mexican taxi driver, and a white guidance counselor who doesn't counsel. They all discover new facets of their own personas as they rally around Willow. An unforgettable story that is soon to be a movie. One would hope that the best lines, peppered throughout, will not be lost in big screen dialogue.

CRITIQUE:

Although the average middle school reader may close this book before the end (and wait for the movie), since it is a hefty 378 pages, yet, the plot is compelling, and so is the writing style. Readers who have lost one or both parents to death or desertion will find the story so engaging that they may look around the room for the characters when the covers are closed. First person narrative brings the story home to readers as though Willow were sitting in a nearby chair telling her story. Sloan also has Willow mention, that there are not many books written for readers who have lost both parents, twice. This draws attention to the biblio-therapeutic value of her story. There are such strong themes here. The main idea is that when people help other people, both are improved. Not a bad lesson for middle schoolers, or all people, for that matter.

RELATED SUBJECTS:

Adoption, Bibliotherapy, Cats, City life, Death, Family love, Foster care, Gifted (in creativity), Giving, Grief, Hispanic Americans, Libraries, Loneliness, Loss, Middle School, Naturalists, Orphans, Parrots, Peer relationships, Person of color, Plants, Prime Numbers, Problem solving, Relationships, Self-respect, Survival

CHARACTER THEMES:

Appreciation of nature, Caring, Community, Compassion, Cooperation, Coping, Dependability, Determination, Diversity, Duty, Encouragement, Generosity, Hope, Humor, Individuality, Initiative, Kindness, Leadership, Patience, Resilience, Responsibility, Sacrifice, Sharing, Spunk, Thrift, Unselfishness, Work ethic

AWARDS:

Beehive Book Award ((UT), Black-Eyed Susan Award (MD), Blue Hen Book Award (DE), Buckeye Children's and Teen Book award (OH), *Bulletin of the*

Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon Books, Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, Colorado Children's Book Award, Cybils Award, Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, Evergreen Teen Book award (WA), Georgia Children's Book award, Golden Sower Award (NE), Grand Canyon Reader Award (AZ), Great Lakes Great Books Award (MI), Great Stone Face Book Award (NH), *Horn Book* Fanfare, Iowa Teen Award, Isinglass Teen Read Award (NH), Kentucky Bluegrass Award, Keystone to Reading Books Award (PA), Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, Magnolia Award (MS), Maine Student Book Award, Mark Twain Award (MO), Massachusetts Children's Book award, Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, Nevada Young Readers' Award, Nutmeg Book Award (CT), NYPL 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing, Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts, Oregon Reader's Choice Award, Pennsylvania Young Readers' Choice Award, Rebeca Caudill Young Readers' Book award, Rhode Island Teen Book Award, *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, Soaring Eagle Book Award (WY), South Carolina Junior Book Award, Sunshine State Young Reader's Award (FL), Teachers' Choices, Texas Bluebonnet Award, Virginia Young Readers' Choice Award, *Washington Post* Best Children's Books, West Australia Young Readers' Book award, William Allen White Children's Book award, Young Hoosier Book Award (IN), Young Reader's Choice Award (Pacific Northwest Library Association)