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Teeny Little Grief Machines (Gravel Road)



Synopsis

Like watching a movie frame by frame, we watch Lexi come unglued in this novel in verse. She's alienated from school and family. Her father is in the county jail. She cannot connect with her chain-smoking stepmom. Her brother, Blaine, is trapped in his own autistic world. And her infant sister's death has sent her into a spiral of grief and rebellion. Bright, witty, and irreverent, Lexi tries to navigate the rocky transition from adolescent to young woman. Just like prose, a novel in verse tells a story. But verse is unique because readers access the text through short chapters, or poems. The varying lengths of the chapters are ideal for a struggling reader, giving them breaks to collect their thoughts, to imagine the characters in their mind's eye, and to set the scene like a frame in a movie. The structure of poetry makes the books appear less intimidating, with plenty of airy white space. Moreover, the depth and substance conveyed in verse is every bit as deep and real as in a Gravel Road prose novel.

Book Information

Series: Gravel Road

Paperback: 243 pages

Publisher: Saddleback Educational Publishing (July 25, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1622508831

ISBN-13: 978-1622508839

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 5.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #744,393 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #112 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Poetry](#)

Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up—Issues of teen pregnancy, drug use, self-harm, alcoholism, autism, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome all shape High's verse novel. Narrator Lexi, 16, lives with her previously incarcerated father, a vacuous and uneducated stepmother, and a brother who is severely autistic. Her mother was a stripper and saddled Lexi with what her classmates call a "stripper" name. This could be—and sometimes is—a heavy-handed problem book. But the verse form serves the voice of Lexi well, and the poems feel authentic. The initial couplet ("My name is Lexi/(rhymes with sexy)") is initially cringe-inducing, but readers begin to understand its aptness as

more is revealed about Lexi and her family history. When the teen's life burdens become too much to bear, she goes to a psychiatric hospital, is healed, and eventually emerges strong enough to survive in her relatively unchanged circumstances. A quick read and a useful one, with some interesting examples of concrete verse, especially, "Life Eats Me Alive," which screams Lexi's anguish in varied fonts. —Nina Sachs, Walker Memorial Library, Westbrook, ME

Book #32 Read in 2016 Teeny Little Grief Machines by Linda Oatman High This is a good YA verse novel. The main character, Lexi, is struggling with her incarcerated father, her stepmother, her autistic brother and the death of her baby sister, on top of the normal trials and tribulations of high school. This book is emotionally raw and will hook readers instantly. A quick read because of the format, it is layered and deep. High school readers and adults would be the ideal audience for this book. I recommend it.

Told entirely in poetry written by the narrator, Lexi, the latest "Gravel Road" novel in verse from Saddleback Publishing is a heartfelt personal journey through hardship, drama, and pain. Life is really screwed up for sixteen year-old Lexi (rhymes with sexy). Her real mom is gone and her dad is in jail for drunk driving. Lexi's stepmom hates her, her little half-brother Blaine has autism and is a complete wreck, and the entire family is still recovering of the sudden death of newborn Clarissa Grace almost a year ago. At school Lexi finds solace with Ms. Rose, a guidance counselor, and sometimes with the cool, tattooed librarian. She paints and writes to express her grief and depression. But when her semi-friends start bullying her and Ms. Rose inexplicably disappears Lexi can't handle school any more. Lexi breaks down and the new counselor calls in the hospital - Lexi has a rehabilitating stay in the mental health ward. Suddenly, she is reborn - she is happy, optimistic, and doesn't want to paint everything a depressing shade of blue. In the end, Lexi joins an after-school art and book club run by the cool librarian (awesome!) and meets a boy that she befriends and falls in love with. While her life hasn't completely changed - her parents are still idiots, her brother still needs constant supervision, and her grades are awful - Lexi has a new outlook on life and a new friend. The story is told through poetry that Lexi writes herself. There is rhyme, but not always. There is repetition and alliteration, when appropriate. The verse isn't overpowering or inexplicable. It's easy to read, but also really captivating. It captures your attention and keeps you turning the pages, wondering what is going to happen to Lexi next. The verse also clearly portrays Lexi's personality, and I loved her attitude and outlook on her home and school. The story is like Lexi's journal, told in poetry; a year of her struggling life documents in little words scribbled on

paper. I loved the poetry. It told Lexi's story so well, in a way that will be easily accessible to readers of any level. While those looking for a deep, complex story with some intense poetry might be disappointed - that isn't the point of this book. "Gravel Road" stories are about being accessible - to readers at a low level, with only a little time, or with a lot more on their mind than just books. TEENY LITTLE GRIEF MACHINES is a great little book with a lot to say about staying positive no matter what life throws at you.

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