



Strong Deaf

Lynn E. McElfresh

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Jade is the only hearing member in her family. Her older sister gets to go to the school for the deaf headed by her grandfather Gilbert, but Jade feels left out. Marla thinks her little sister is a pest and a brat. When they end up on the same softball team for the summer, neither is happy about it. Jade, the smallest player on the team, is assigned to be the catcher. It looks like it's going to be a long season. As sisters, they are often at loggerheads, but as team mates Jade and Marla have to find ways to get along. In spite of their differences, they soon discover that each has a lot to offer the other.

Strong Deaf Details

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From Reader Review Strong Deaf for online ebook

Kari says

Jade the only hearing person in her family battles with her sister Marla almost constantly when she is home from her boarding school for the Deaf. Their extended family have a long line of being Strong Deaf - living Deaf with pride, passion and achievements. I loved how this back and forth story between sisters uses ASL speak and thoughts whenever a Deaf person is talking, thinking or speaking ASL. Excellent for young readers looking for a story about sibling issues and those interested in Deaf culture as well.

Tima says

Note: I received this ARC free in exchange for an honest review.

Early Bird Notes: Okay, so I get that when ASL is directly translated into English (PSE/SEE) it is choppy and "caveman" sounding. When it is signed in ASL, it is not. It is fluid; like any other sentence. It drives me nuts that the author, whose sister is deaf, would continue to push forward a stereotype that signing is equivalent to "dumbed down English". Any language you translate directly will come across juvenile in the other language but makes sense when in context of the original language. Deaf people [that I know] do not think in these fragmented sentences, they think like everyone else does. To have the story told in ridiculous fragments, by Marla, is just insulting.

37% completed: What I do like about the book, is the interaction Marla (deaf) has with her new softball coach (hearing). It's an all too common situation I've seen, where a hearing person speaks BIIIG EXXXAAGGERRATTED WORRRRRRDDSSS to the person who is deaf. Slow and loud, as if that will make them suddenly hear. What I thought was idiotic was that when Marla's friend (hearie, fingerspells entire sentences) says that "Choke up on the bat" is an idiom - Marla reacts as if ASL has NO idioms and that she's completely unfamiliar with them. ASL has idioms and they know what they are. (You can even see a few here, as an example. OR See video examples here, which are way more fun.) Not to mention, Marla supposedly has been playing softball for several years; which makes it unlikely that she has never in her life come across any softball lingo.

The book's one redeeming quality was when Marla's friend tells a story about how she went to a hearing school for 8 years and is the only deaf child in her entire family, how alone she felt, how isolated and out of place. Until she went to a deaf school and felt like she was Harry Potter - a wizard in a magical place surrounded by magical people like her. When Marla says her sister isn't REAL family because she isn't deaf and tries to use the story against Jade, calling her a "muggle". The father (deaf) says "Maybe story backward. Maybe Jade wizard, you muggle". As Jade is the only hearing girl in a deaf family. That was profound, a sentence that could open many eyes on both sides of these cultures.

This book was a big disappointment, overall. The characters were highly unlikable - 2 bratty, spoiled sisters who are supposed to be 12 & 14, but who both act far beyond their years in a way that isn't very believable. The sisters are downright mean to each other the entire book, then they have a moment and they're all peachy keen and lovey-dovey. Marla has a deep-seeded resentment for all her hearing family - even her sister who signs 100% fluently - but has no problem with hearing friends who fingerspell entire sentences? Why do they

do that, by the way? Many times throughout the book, Marla is referenced as texting incessantly to all her friends, deaf and hearing. So why does she randomly cease to forget her cell phone exists and rely on slow pidgin finger spelling with the twins? I feel like an opportunity was missed here to shed real experience and bridges into an area that is only recently being brought to light again. She had many small references to subplots (Hearing president at Gallaudet and the protests that caused, how hearing people and deaf people interact, cochlear implants, etc) and instead she decided to focus on petty pre-teen angst. The plot was weak, disjointed and just seemed to come together however the author needed it to - with little forethought.

jesse says

point-of-views switching between two sisters 2 years apart in age in a deaf family. the younger one jade, is the only hearing member in her family. it was heartbreaking seeing her struggle and fail fitting into her family. being excluded. i found it a bold move from the author to attempt to write a pov from a deaf person, which reads the same way they 'speak' through sign language. chopped off, but with a certain kind of beauty, because of its simplicity:

open car door, climb out, stretch. home long time. all summer. no homework. no tests. no dorm inspection.

surprise. feeling same snake touch leg. maybe scream, but no. turn around, beezly greet me. not snake. dog tail. beezly my dog. sister jade think beezly her dog, because jade live home all year. i older. i first daughter. first love of beezly.

beezly now old. gray nose. hug beezly neck, shut eye. beezly lick face. laugh. dog tongue tickle. open eye.
[arc, 3%]

wow, i don't think i can name even one family that is *this* kind of organized (mine included!):

"dad and i made the menu for the next couple of days, then heated up some leftovers for lunch."
[arc, 59%]

* * *

"i didn't think it was fair that i should be punished because i could hear"
[arc, 14%]

Dawn Vanniman says

I received this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Jade is the only hearing person in her family. Her siblings, parents and grandparents are deaf. Her older sister lives at school during the week, just coming home on weekends and holidays. Needless to say, Jade and her sister do NOT get along.

The story is told from both perspectives. Jade's portion is in written English, while Marla's is in written ASL. If you aren't familiar with ASL, it might take a bit of getting used to. It's a little choppy.

It was fun to see things from the viewpoint of the hearing person being in the minority. The two sisters bring up both sides of Audism - the view that being able to speak and hear is the best and anything else is stupid; the view that being deaf and signing is the best and anything else is stupid. Audism isn't brought up specifically, but it's demonstrated very well.

Even though the two sisters are very bratty, I can see where it's very realistic. They're 12 & 14 years old, they have difficulty communicating, they're teenagers!

Westcoast_girl says

This book might be good but I just can't get past the putting ASL in the written English.

ASL is not a written language. By putting it into words, you make it sound dumb and non-expressive. When signing, ASL is just as descriptive, expressive, and real a language as spoken English is. Lynn McElfresh also has Marla text in ASL syntax, which is not accurate. Deaf people can write just as well as hearing people can, and usually do so in the same syntax as English.

Rmelbyhastings says

Jade and Marla's sibling rivalry in *Strong Deaf* is easy to identify with, typical of any sisters, though it is deepened by each sister's belief that the other lives in another world. The title refers to a term in the deaf community that speaks of choosing to embrace the culture of the non-hearing rather than attempting to assimilate into the hearing society.

Jade and Marla's voices are clear and distinguishable as their point-of-views alternate each chapter (less advanced readers may be frustrated by the grammatical structure of the transliterated ASL often used, but more independent readers will be fascinated by it). Both characters mature as the story advances, and while the ending is a bit neat, it isn't inappropriately simple for the intended audience.

In short, this title is ideal for a classroom read, with plenty of opportunity for discussions and connections.

Brittany says

****Original review posted on honestreviewscorner.com****

Strong Deaf is a **unique experience** in many ways. For one, the story is told from alternating perspectives –

between Jade and her older sister Marla. As Marla is deaf, her **part of the story is told in ASL** [American Sign Language] – which can be hard to adjust to when you're reading it and not seeing it.

Once I got used to the style, I enjoyed it and it really helped me to see things from Marla's perspective. As a reader with some experience with ASL, I found myself imagining Marla sitting in front of me signing her side of the story. However, **readers unfamiliar with ASL may have more difficulty adjusting** enough to get into the story.

What also adds to Strong Deaf's uniqueness is the fact that – whereas many stories about deaf children involve the deaf child living in a family of hearing – in this story, the hearing sister is actually the minority in her household. It was a nice change getting to see the hearing/deaf ratio essentially reversed, and seeing the deaf culture from a family so strongly involved in it.

As for the content, **the synopsis is not really an accurate summary** of the book as the majority of the storyline and character development takes place off the softball field. Also, though both siblings had their life lessons to learn, I actually felt that Marla was more immature than her little sister – and downright condescending towards the hearing world, including those in her own family. Of course, as Marla points out, she's a teenager now, and so the extreme behavior Marla displayed could have been an intentional reflection of her age. Fortunately, the two girls have stable parents and an extended family to help guide the young girls through such an awkward time.

That said, Strong Deaf is **a story about young siblings learning how to relate to each other** – though from an added extreme than most siblings find themselves – and with that, McElfresh crafted a fantastic story. Though revolving around deaf culture and the differences between the hearing and deaf, **anyone with siblings close in age can relate** to the story. Who doesn't remember the petty fights – arguing over chores, personal space, privacy, friendships – with their siblings? Readers can also relate to Jade's feeling of not knowing how to fit in – even among her own family.

McElfresh's new book is **a great recommendation for children and young adults**. It's a pretty quick read that will hopefully leave the reader with new insights. Strong Deaf conveys a message that is much-needed among young siblings trying to move from rivalry to maturity.

Clementine says

Jade is the only person in her family who can hear. They are Deaf with a capital D. Her older sister Marla gets to go to the all-deaf boarding school that her family is deeply involved in, but Jade has to go to a hearing school. The two are different as night and day, and Jade feels left out of her sister's world. When the two end up on the same softball team all summer, they're forced to really spend time together and start communicating. What they discover about themselves and each other changes their perspectives.

A short, sweet novel aimed at middle grade readers, McElfresh's novel tries to make Deaf culture accessible for the outsider. In some ways, she succeeds at creating a loving family with very different children who both just want to be accepted. McElfresh uses dual perspectives to narrate the book, and each sister has a chance to get her say. It moves quickly and will work for reluctant readers, because each chapter is short.

However, I couldn't help but find myself uncomfortable with how McElfresh chose to translate Marla's chapters. Marla uses ASL to communicate, and as a result, her narration uses short, choppy sentences that

read more like “dumbed down” English than anything. While I understand that ASL doesn’t translate perfectly to standard written English, it is a language of its own, and this felt like a weird disservice to the characters and the readers. ASL flows beautifully when it’s being signed, and there’s no reason to do a literal translation in a book like this, especially with no explanation or rationale as to why.

McElfresh is hearing but has a deaf sister. She wrote the book to explore what it was like for two sisters who communicate differently, and there’s some nice stuff here. I just couldn’t get past how squirmy I felt about the ASL translation.

It might find an audience of young readers interested in Deaf culture.

Strong Deaf by Lynn McElfresh. Namelos: 2012. Electronic galley accepted for review via NetGalley.

Nancy says

I almost stopped reading at page 17: "While my signs are more Exact Signed English, they use ASL, sort of a sign language shortcut..." Aaaaargh! No no no! One, it's Signed Exact English (SEE), and it seems unlikely to me that a child of deaf parents with a deaf sibling who has signed from birth would use SEE. Two, ASL is not "sign language shortcut" but a rich, full language with a completely different grammar and syntax than English!

To me it was obvious that a hearing person outside the Deaf community wrote this, and I was disappointed. I suppose it would still make for a good read for reluctant middle schoolers, especially deaf students.

Iroquois says

I give this book credit for effort, but unfortunately it didn't completely work well enough for me. The ASL was basically translated into what's sometimes called CODA-speak but I personally feel that was a poor choice for Marla's character since she's not only deaf but Deaf (which means culturally deaf) and speaking fluent ASL. This means that her grammar and syntax are fluent and completely sensible in ASL but when transliterated into English like the book has done it then sounds as if it's wonky, broken-English.

As far as the story itself it was ok but seemed to lose its way at certain points and had trouble transitioning into an ending. I liked the idea but overall it didn't read smoothly and the sisters resolution seemed to come out of nowhere. I think having more involvement of parent conversations would have helped. As it was the mother character was very peripheral.

Kellee says

Reviewed at: <http://www.teachmentortexts.com/2012/...>

This little book packs a big punch - so much more than I was expecting!

I am so glad that this book crossed my path so that I was able to read it. I have not read any other book that had the point of view that Lynn McElfresh chose for her novel. Although the theme seems classic- sibling

rivalry, fitting in- it is much more than that. In most books when it is about sibling rivalry or fitting in, it is usually an underdog wanting to be "normal". In Jade's world, she is "normal" because she is hearing and allowed to go to public school and leave a regular life, but it makes her not fit in with her family who are prominent members of the Deaf community.

My favorite part of this book is that it is told from two perspectives, Marla and Jade, and each character has such a distinct voice. This may not seem unique, but it is when the author chooses to have his deaf character's written prose to be translated from American Sign Language (ASL). In ASL many linking and helping verbs are dropped and sentences and conversation sounds different than we are used to. What a great conversation starter and it really helps us hearing readers to understand how sign language works. Although Jade's voice does sound younger than her 12 years, throughout the book her maturity evolves which coincides with the time of life she is supposed to be in.

This book will be a great addition to a classroom library, a class discussion about language or deafness, or will become very special in the hands of the right child.

Candy says

I think it is safe to say that for anyone who is familiar with deaf culture, this story is not only relatable but enlightening as well. To learn about a hearing person's experience in an all deaf family is unusual; most of my friends who are deaf have only hearing relatives. It's interesting how being the only different one in your family makes one feel alone and resent their differences...even going as far as to wish you were deaf to feel accepted by those you love.

The dual POV's of Jade and Marla were essential to getting the message of Strong Deaf across to the reader and were written brilliantly. While I enjoyed reading Jade's thoughts, I loved how Ms. McElfresh told Marla's POV in ASL gloss. Having to do skits or demos in ASL on a regular basis, I write my notes on paper using English but in ASL order. So I completely understood Marla and at times, found myself signing her words >.< Now that's what I call audience participation lol.

Strong Deaf is much more than two sisters learning to get along with each other (I did take Jade's side however and was happy when Marla finally became less bratty and more likeable); it was about learning to be empathetic and overcoming prejudice regardless of whether you are part of the minority or not. To try and understand a person takes effort and determination, requiring that we put them and their feelings ahead of our own. If you can do that, then unity will ensue just as it did for Jade and Marla. A short heartwarming story, Strong Deaf has an important lesson for us all.

Thank you NetGalley for providing a copy for review ^.^

Betty says

Combine sibling rivalry within a "strong Deaf" family that includes a hearing daughter leads the reader to understand a bit about Deaf culture. Jade is twelve, her sister Marla fourteen. Marla attends a residential school for the deaf and comes home for the summer and weekends. Neither girl likes it when Marla is home, and the rivalry becomes intense. Their parents and one set of grandparents are Strong Deaf, more about that

below.

The story is told from both girls' perspectives. Jade's narrative is in perfect English. Marla's is typed as if signed in ASL. The casual reader may find reading ASL a bit off-putting. Even though I know ASL, I had a hard time reading it at first as it is not a language to be put down on paper. Consider Marla's narrative as a dialect told through the hands, instead of voicing.

The author does a great job showing unspoken motives behind the characters' actions. One example: that summer Dad decides he doesn't want to have to drive to two different softball practices and games. He, therefore, convinces the softball league organizer that Jade should be on Marla's team, even though she isn't actually old enough. His excuse is for Jade to act as an interpreter. Interpreter? **No way!** This only adds fuel to the fire of sibling rivalry.

The parents are so Strong Deaf that they drive to Gallaudet University when there is an uprising about hiring a new president. They leave the girls behind with Grandma H (the hearing grandmother). Marla is quite peeved! A very interesting book.

Bec says

This is a great insight into deaf culture and feeling like the odd one out - Jade is hearing in a deaf world, her older sister Marla lives at a deaf school where she feels like everyone else, but home for the long summer holidays she feels left out when it comes to her sister. Growing up with deafness in my family (although not to the degree of Jade's family) I related to a lot of this book.

Those not familiar with sign language grammar may struggle a little as (especially Marla's parts) is written as it would be signed.

Allison says

This was a short, simple book, but an important one. It is essentially a story of sibling rivalry, but what makes it fascinating is the relationship between the two girls. I've read a lot about Deaf history and Deaf culture, and there is a lot of talk about how it is for deaf kids to grow up in hearing households with varying levels of Sign fluency. This is the first book I've read / discussion I've seen about what it would be like for a hearing girl to grow up in a Deaf household.

That part was fascinating. For example, Jade mentioned that though she had grown up immersed in Sign, she signed more like Signed English instead of with ASL grammar, and had a hard time keeping up with the shortcuts and slang that are constantly changing in the language. Theoretically, she's a native ASL speaker, and thus should be as aware of the placement differences between the signs for "lemon" and for "lunch" as her congenitally deaf older sister. But this is not the case. However, the author's website says that she has a deaf sister, and is thus probably quite involved in the Deaf community, and knows about differing levels of ASL fluency. It was a surprise to me.

Similarly, several people mentioned that they were thrown off in the beginning by Marla's chapters being written in ASL grammar instead of standard English grammar. I enjoyed it, because I could imagine some of the ASL signs that I knew. Now if only the book came with movie outtakes so that we could see some of the

scenes playing out! Actually, this book would make a fantastic movie.

For those who are perhaps not fascinated with the ins and outs of ASL linguistics, say, some of the young adults to whom it is marketed, it's a fun story that kids should be able to relate to and enjoy. It's a story (on both sisters' parts) of feeling like you don't belong, and that's something that all teenagers can relate to.
