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Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich

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In this terrific debut, a Brooklyn middle-schooler finds the superhero within himself thanks to old friends, new dreams, and a pair of magical "Dora the Explorer" sneakers.

Ever since a deeply unfortunate incident earlier this year, Reggie's been known as "Pukey" McKnight at his high-intensity Brooklyn middle school. He wants to turn his image around, but he has other things on his mind as well: his father, who's out of a job; his best friends, Ruthie and Joe C.; his former best friend Donovan, who's now become a jerk; and of course, the beautiful Mialonie. The elections for school president are coming up, but with his notorious nickname and "nothing" social status, Reggie wouldn't stand a chance, if he even had the courage to run. (CONT.)

Eighth-Grade Superzero Details

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Author : Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich

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From Reader Review Eighth-Grade Superzero for online ebook

Katie says

Recap:

"Say to them,
say to the down-keepers,
the sun-slappers,
the self-soilers,
the harmony-hushers,
'even if you are not ready for day,
it cannot always be night.'" - Gwendolyn Brooks, from "Speech to the Young: Speech to the Progress-Toward"

Reggie is a zero. After vomiting in front of the entire student body on the first day of school, more people now know him as "Pukey" than as "Reggie." He has his two best friends, Ruthie and Joe C, but it's tough to be thankful for two when you're teased on a daily basis by pretty much everyone else.

Reggie's youth group, made up of kids from all different schools, is the only place where he gets to just be himself. When the group gets involved at a local homeless shelter, Reggie stops trying to shrink into the background and actually starts stepping up to lead some things. And it feels pretty good.

But stepping up at school, in front of Donovan, Hector, Sparrow and all of the other kids who love making him miserable... it would take a super hero to do that.

Review:

This is NOT at all what I was expecting. I vividly remember seeing this title on at least 6 different blog posts over at Reading In Color last year. I had wanted to read it because Ari was such a huge fan, but just kept putting it off. When I decided to take on the personal challenge of reading ONLY books by or about people of color for this month, 8th Grade Super Zero was at the top of my list.

Honestly, even though it had such stellar recommendations, the title had me expecting it to just be kind of kiddish, and maybe not in such a good way. Oh, how wrong I was!

In this incredibly rich novel, Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich tackles themes like racism, homelessness, social justice, bullying, and religion. And she does it all with grace, truth, and a sense of humor. Now that's talent.

All throughout the novel, Rhuday-Perkovich illustrates examples of what it could be like to be young and dark skinned in America today. Since he was five-years-old, Reggie's parents have taught him to do quick "police scans" when he sees an officer, just in case he gets hassled later. When he complains that his friend Joe C doesn't have to sign up for community service, his mother responds, "White folks have that luxury." When Joe C gets into DJing and invites Reggie on a hip-hop tour of New York, Reggie wants to go but thinks, "Maybe, but it also sounds like it has a high awkward quotient." And so he responds, "I don't think so. I don't think Black people go on those tours. We know all of that stuff already." The book is filled with similar scenes that made me think about what I take for granted.

Reggie's family is from Jamaica, so his story also includes "tastes" of traditional Jamaican food like his

mother's callaloo, festival and fried fish, and codfish and ackee. His father also gives him "Black Voices in Poetry: A Pan-African Panthology," a book that Reggie is initially reluctant to read, but whose words end up making several significant appearances over the course of his story. One of my favorite scenes was when his father quoted the wildly talented, Jamaican-American, Claude McKay:

"If we must die, O let us nobly die/ So that our precious blood may not be shed/ In vain; then even the monsters we defy/ Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!"

Religion also played a large role throughout the novel. Reggie got involved with the homeless shelter, which is the catalyst for his personal transformation, because of his youth group. Their leader forces them to grapple with tough questions and is a steady presence in the back of Reggie's mind.

There's so much that I'm not mentioning because this review could easily become an essay: the many faces and voices that Rhuday-Perkovich gives to the homeless, the election for class president, the comic book-super hero tie in, Reggie's feisty best friend Ruthie - who would surely change the world were she not a fictional character... There is just SO MUCH GOODNESS here!

Recommendation:

I think I would peg 8th Grade Super Zero more as MG than YA. This book would be AMAZING to use as a class novel, and I am SO disappointed that I didn't read it while we were still in Baltimore, because I would have immediately DonorsChoose'd a class set for my 6th graders! Read, read, read this book. You will be so happy you did.

Ann says

Rhuday-Perkovich has created a delightful multicultural setting that feels authentic, not planned for best effect. Protagonist, Reggie McKnight tells his story with a strong, believable voice. He's funny, articulate, confused, compassionate, questioning, bright, perceptive, trying to fit in, wanting to stand out, seeking his own true voice. He is surrounded by good friends, caring adults, and a number of the usual suspects of middle school. Readers see deeply into Reggie's mind and spirit and root for him to stand tall in an only-Reggie-can way.

There are so few books that show the main character involved in a faith-based organization and/or doing community service for the right reasons. I loved Reggie's commitment to his church youth group and how his spiritual life guided and informed his decisions without his being a goodie-goodie.

Middle school readers will relate to Reggie's struggles with identity, friends, school social life and family and may even find themselves inspired to find their own way to make a difference in the world.

Rebecca says

Preachy. Unfortunately that's the first thing that comes to mind when I think of this book. It wasn't that I didn't like reading it. Or that I disagreed with what was being preached. But it was a lot. There are some really good themes presented. Reggie has to learn how to stand up for himself and others. He has to choose to do what is right when it isn't easy. He has to make choices about what is most important and what he is going to do about it. He has to learn lessons about judging people and being a good citizen and a good role model. He has to learn how to be a good friend when both are growing and changing. All while he is dealing

with questions of doubt and faith in God. He is a likable kid who isn't perfect and doesn't have all the answers but is looking for them. You care about him and want him to make the right choices and root for him and his friends. The people who surround Reggie are a diverse bunch but all written well and well developed. They are all believable as are the situations that Reggie manages to get himself into and his reactions to his challenging and changing world. But he gets involved with a homeless shelter and the book hits the point of service to the community rather hard. And that's where it starts to get preachy. It's a good thing for kids to hear about but there is so much in the book you start to feel a little beat over the head by it. It's a good story about good characters that just pushes a little too hard at times. It is still an entertaining book that left me caring about Reggie and his friends. And wanting to read his comic book.

Anna says

I borrowed this book from a classroom library at my school, so first of all let me say that I'm happy I'm starting to see more diverse books on middle school shelves! Overall I liked this book—I thought it was authentic and real. I only really had two problems. One was that it probably could have been a little shorter. There were definitely some scenes and plot lines (basically the whole Vicky subplot) that were dragged out for too long there were WAY too many characters, some with similar names and a lot who were only mentioned in passing with no reintroduction, and I got confused about who was who a lot. But would I still recommend this to my students? Absolutely.

Karen Koch says

I liked this more than I expected to. It feels a little bit preachy sometimes— especially the campaign speech at the end— but overall it has a good message, mostly believable situations, and likeable characters. A good book for middle schoolers to read.

Paul Sain says

Reggie is an 8th grade boy who takes the risk of running for his school president. But along the way he discovers something more important: a homeless shelter where his little friend Charlie lives. He devotes his campaign to restoring and helping the homeless shelter.

Audrey says

I don't think it's hyperbole to say this is one of the best middle-grade novels I have ever read.

When people use the word ambitious, there's often a negativity lurking beneath it--that the author is to be admired for taking on so much, even if she didn't succeed.

Eighth-Grade Superzero is an ambitious book that delivers, and then some. It deals with important issues--homelessness, religion, social responsibility, family dynamics--but readers will hardly notice. They will be caught up in the characters' interactions. They will be swept away by the voice! What a voice! I heart

Reggie! And readers will laugh from start to finish.

Give me six stars, Good Reads. This book gets six.

Hank Fisher says

8th Grade SuperZero is about a kid named Reggie who lives in New York. He's just trying to fit in. After a humiliating first day of school, he tries to find out who he really is by entering school politics, a religious youth group, an a Big Buddy system. He's also trying to avoid teasing. With the help of his friends, Joe C., Ruthie, and Charlie he tries to make this his best school year yet.

I think that this book is both positive and negative. The book explains that it doesn't matter if your cool or not to be happy. Anybody can make a difference. The one thing that continued to annoy me through the book was that the kids act and talk completely different from how kids act and talk in real life. Charlie was talking like he was in 5th grade. My last complaint was that the story lacked excitement and drama.

Sierra says

3.5—maybe could have been higher, but wasn't a huge fan of the ending.

Gail says

3.5

Patti Sabik says

This book was a very good debut. It did come across a little preachy and it could have been edited down by approximately 50 pages. Some of the messages were a bit excessive and could have been toned down. I thought the school election concepts could have been handled with a bit more tact and less drama; Vicky could have been a bit more "real" - I thought her perspective of a certain party was excellent, but then it fizzled into borderline craziness and she quit the race (and no one was following her - I would think some of the academic kids would support her grade incentive-based platform.)

The characters came across as believable middle schoolers, but Reggie was very single-focused and preachy. Throughout the book, Reggie believes HIS passion (the shelter) should be EVERYONE'S passion. Towards the end of the book there is one mention of him realizing his friend Ruthie's passion (global issues) through his desire to have his middle school connect with his mom's alma mater in Jamaica. I believe this to be an important point because as much as Reggie was trying to have a campaign focusing around the students' of

Clarke Junior he still managed to always bring it around to his passion, the shelter. I think if the editor had cut and streamline a bit of the extraneous details and repetitious elements this story could have been much more effective.

Steph Su says

EIGHTH-GRADE SUPERZERO combines quality elements of literature into an incredible feel-good read. The varied cast of characters will win you over despite an oftentimes slow plot.

Reggie and his friends are eighth graders, but readers of all ages can easily relate to their interactions and the issues they face. Reggie is a sympathetic self-labeled underdog who never feels secondary to us: he is bullied, but he also has an inner strength that we can recognize even if he cannot yet. Reggie's best friends, Ruthie and Joe C, are also fascinating and well-developed characters who could very easily be your best friends as well.

While it contains a great message, the plot of EIGHTH-GRADE SUPERZERO is unfortunately very slow. It takes over half the book before Reggie decides to run for president, which gets exceedingly frustrating as Reggie continues not to take action up to that point. There are a number of secondary plots—Reggie's friendship with a young homeless student, his increasing dedication to the local homeless shelter—but, while they are well-developed, they more often than not took time that I think would've been better spent focusing on and tightening the main story.

Overall, however, if you have the time and patience to dedicate to this story, EIGHTH-GRADE SUPERZERO is absolutely delightful. This is a well-written story full of diverse (yet all fully realized) characters with lots of heart. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this book to others, and look forward to seeing what this talented author has for us next.

Leslie says

Reginald Garvey McKnight would have preferred to begin the 8th grade school year as King of Clarke Junior School (a High Academic, Study Intensive Middle School). Instead, he fast becomes known as Pukey and is made a school-wide laughingstock. Such a reputation is not easily overcome as Reggie tries to figure out who he is and how to let the world see him for his better attributes (not his weak stomach). He isn't the only one. 8th Grade Super Zero is ripe with characters trying to figure out what they would become; some forced to re-invent themselves for the umpteenth time (as adults are not exempt from Rhuday-Perkovich's cast list).

There is a class-presidential election taking place where the subject of the popular vote versus the best qualified comes into play—as well as each candidate's motivations. This is a perfect opportunity to stand up and make a difference, to give popularity a run for its money, but how determined is Reggie to make the effort and put himself out there for probable ridicule? And isn't there enough going on?

Reggie's youth group teams up with National Public Radio (NPR) to collect stories from those living in the neighborhood homeless shelter Olive Branch. Youth group is a place Reggie feels comfortable being himself and finds leadership roles a natural outpouring of his confidence and his growing interest in the homeless.

His own father has been unemployed too long now and Reggie begins to recognize some of the children at the shelter from school—one is his assigned “Little Buddy” kindergartner Charlie. Reggie takes a passionate interest in the shelter and involves his schoolmates. He would like to see the school form a community service partnership with the shelter and makes this one his many platforms as he decides to become a late-runner in the elections.

“I walked to school thinking of those people at the shelter looking like they’ve got no reason to keep going...but they were still moving forward. By the end of our interview, George was talking about going back to school to get a master’s degree. In our meeting at the end of the session, Jeff said his partner wanted to build birdhouses, and I watched this little girl pretending to be an astronaut. That takes a kind of faith that I’ve never even thought about before. (75)

As Reggie begins to take interest in the community around him, he discovers more about his own self and grows in confidence and stature. It isn’t without numerous complications, of course. There is the bully who goes out of his way to torment Reggie and friends. There is the stress of one unemployed parent, and one overworked. His older sister creates her own conflict-ridden dynamic. His long-time friends are undergoing their own changes, interests begin to diverge, and the way each sees each other begins to fracture under the strain (which isn’t the worst thing).

Creating change and/or surviving it can be difficult; Rhuday-Perkovich keeps things real, and she keeps it hopeful. Middle-graders able to take interest in self and others simultaneously? There is no false optimism in 8th Grade Super Zero. In Reggie and his peers, the author does not see a generation of young people who are incapable of seeing the community/world around them and making a difference. She acknowledges that life at their age is not easy and there is a lot to sort through, there is a lot to take in, but no one runs the gamut alone, we need each other, and we all want to be worthwhile. Rhuday-Perkovich continually asserts the obvious but not easy: that One informs and is informed by their peers, their families, their communities. This is good, and it can be scary. Embrace it and watch yourself become someone with potential—Yourself.

Rhuday-Perkovich’s writing is really nice. She creates an earnest, charming, and articulate first person narrative with Reggie. There is a lot of heart and a lot of humor. And can I say how refreshing it is to see the portrayal of a young person pursuing their spirituality/working out their Faith? The novel isn’t too message-y, and refuses definitive answers for every inquisition Reggie would/might pursue.

Issues of race are mentionable. Reggie’s best friend Joe C. is white and is sometimes a source of embarrassment for him; and their cultural differences create some divisions in their relationship. Joe C. as a character has to overcome some of the skewed (harmful) suppositions his father makes concerning the homeless. Reggie’s father works from a certain hierarchy of acceptability. It’s the world the characters live in that the author wouldn’t ignore, however she doesn’t necessarily dwell. She infuses a level of authenticity into her setting/characterization as she acknowledges the implications rather deftly.

There is a lot going on and to take in Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich’s 8th Grade Super Zero and the reader can, for the most part, dwell at will. I can’t say the pacing isn’t somewhat weighted down at times, but once invested Reggie and friends are compelling. A reader is bound to see some aspects of themselves in one or more of the characters—a revitalizing mirror in a catalog of predominantly white and affluent, often broken, often trendy (even in rebellion), and blinkered.

I see this novel as a good one for middle-grade book clubs, class readings, for youth group**; both boys and girls should be interested. The novel is relevant without need of outside guidance. The text would engage and it’s accessibility is capable of instigating more than enough conversation. It doesn’t insult the reader by being too simple, but it doesn’t require a degree to decipher either.

8th Grade Super Zero is also just flat-out entertaining, so if you need an easy recommendation for summer into autumn reading...

In a lot of ways 8th Grade Super Zero reminds me of Crystal Allen's How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba-Sized Trophy (Balzer & Bray, 2011). Both have wonderful narrators/protagonists with whom the reader can commiserate and still enjoy their individualized thoughts/struggles/triumphs. Both delve into the relevant subjects of keeping friends, trying to reinvent one's self, and boys in relationship with their parents and siblings and girls. If you like one, chances are you will enjoy the other. There is also a bit of Francisco X. Stork in Super Zero, (maybe an earlier-reader version); which can only be a good thing.

L @ omphaloskepsis

<http://contemplatrix.wordpress.com/20...>

Nolan Winter says

This is a book about a boy who gets the nickname Pukey at the beginning of the school year and his attempts at clearing that reputation. Reggie McKnight is a 8th grade kid in Brooklyn, New York. Reggie would have preferred to begin the 8th grade school year as King of Clarke Junior School. He instead becomes known as Pukey and is made a school-wide laughingstock. Having a bad reputation is not an easy thing to overcome as Reggie tries to figure out who he is and how to let the world see him for his better attributes. Reggie has been trying to lay low and hang out with his friend Joe creating their comic book Night Man. Unfortunately, for Reggie his troubles do not stop when he comes home from school. At home, Reggie's father struggles with unemployment while his mother is carrying the family by herself. Even though the situation is not super serious yet, there is always this fear hanging over Reggie's head that they might lose everything one day. This sense of losing everything grows even more once he starts visiting a local shelter, the Olive Branch, for homeless people as part of a Youth Group's oral history assignment in which he must interview the residents. Charlie, his "little brother" from a school program, where 8th graders and kindergarteners spend time together, lives there. At school, the elections for school president are coming up and Reggie reluctantly signs up as the manager of another kid's campaign. Always in the back of his mind, is his best friend Ruthie who is this revolutionary kid always reminding him about the big picture.

Deva Fagan says

I was impressed by how many different threads got wound into this book, and it's refreshing to see characters of faith represented as normal, everyday people living their lives.

Now what I want is a companion book with the excellent Ruthie as the main character...
