



Freaky Fast Frankie Joe

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When twelve-year-old Frankie Joe's mother is sent to jail, he is uprooted from his home in Texas to live with the father he has never met, his father's wife, and his father's four "legitimate" sons in Illinois. Frankie Joe is miserable. Trying to adjust to his blended family proves too much to bear, so Frankie Joe hatches a plot to escape on his bike back home to Texas. For that he needs money, and so Frankie Joe's Freaky Fast Delivery Service is born. His deliveries win new friends, a place in the rural Illinois community, and a sense of achievement. But his planned escape is destroyed by a heartbreaking betrayal, and Frankie Joe needs all of his incredible resilience and the loving support of his new family to survive the devastating loss.

Freaky Fast Frankie Joe Details

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From Reader Review Freaky Fast Frankie Joe for online ebook

Suzanne says

Frankie Joe thinks his life is normal. He lives with his mother who is always after the next scheme that will get her rich. She is gone all the time, usually on dates, and he is left with the retired people who live in the trailer part around them in Laredo Texas. Now Frankie is moving to Clearview, Illinois to live with his father (who he has never met) and his family because mom has been arrested on drug charges.

Once there, Frankie finds that he is resented by Matt, his half brother who used to be the oldest child and is now displaced by Frankie. Right away conflicts develop. All of his brothers are very smart. Frankie has attended little school, so he is placed in a grade lower because he is behind. Being tall for his age anyway, Frankie is teased mercilessly and is miserable.

Both his father and stepmother love him and try desperately to make his life better. Still Frankie misses his mom and plans to escape and go back to the trailer park to wait until she is out of jail.

What he does not count on is that life in Illinois is good for him. He is doing well in school, has made friends, and is earning the respect of both school and community. But still he thinks he wants his mother. He finally sees her for what she really is when she sells the quilt he won in a raffle and gave her for Christmas to get cash for herself and her latest man to go to Las Vegas. She sold her memory of him and did not seem to care.

Frankie uses his skill at riding bikes fast to start his own delivery service and earns the respect of everyone including his dad and step mom, who, in the end, adopt him.

Wonderful story. Natural way to teach about the dictionary and vocabulary since Frankie uses and defines new terms throughout the book. Great story.

Ms. Foley says

This is a good realistic fiction story about family. It's very character centered and I liked how the family wasn't perfect. Usually you have an evil stepmother in stories, but Frankie's stepmother is really kind, so that was a nice change of pace. This is one of the 2013-2014 Bluebonnet books and it's the first of the chapter books that I've read. Between this and the 3 picture books we're off to a good start for the Bluebonnet list!

Teresa Bateman says

Frankie Joe was living in a trailer park in Laredo, Texas when his mother wound up in jail. While she may not have been the most reliable of parents, she was what he was used to. So when the father he never knew before collects him and takes him to a rural town in Illinois to live with him, his wife, and his four sons, Frankie's world is turned upside down. It doesn't help that his new brothers resent him and that he's put back a grade in school. While Frankie's a good kid it's hard fitting into a new household where not everyone likes him, and where the chores and the homework pile up. He begins to plan his escape--he'll run away back to Texas. But he's started a small bicycle delivery business, and has some regular customers and even a new

friend. And his father and his dad's wife are nice people. If only his new brothers liked him. I didn't expect to like this book as much as I did, but it grabs you right from the first page and Frankie Joe is such a compelling character that you can't help rooting for his eventual success. Your heart sinks with his troubles, and rises with his triumphs. Ultimately, it's a hard book to put down.

Cindy says

Audience: Intermediate

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Discussion Questions using Bloom's Taxonomy:

Remembering: Can you explain why Frankie Joe decided to start his delivery service?

Understanding: Write an outline of events from the story.

Applying: What questions would you ask Frankie Joe's mom if you could interview her?

Analyzing: In your own words interpret Matt's behavior towards Frankie Joe giving 2-3 examples to support your opinion.

Evaluating: How would you have handled moving to a new place, and new family? What choices would you have made?

Creating: Rewrite the ending of the story.

Tina says

In our classroom we have been reading and writing realistic fiction haven't we? Well today I would like to book talk this great example of the realistic fiction genre of books.

This book is called Freaky Fasy Frankie Joe By Lutricia Clifton.

This book is about a boy who gets sent to live with his father who he does not even know.

This situation is a hard one for a lot of us to imagine because we come from homes where our parents live together.

Franky is sent there because his mother is sent to jail. Another situation that is difficult for us to imagine.

When we talk about realistic fiction as being something that could happen but didn't, this book is not going to be one that most of us could make text to self connections to but it will open our eyes to new and different situations other than our own.

There are two settings in the book and I would like for you to listen for them and compare them as you read.

I would recommend this book for students 5-8 grade.

(2012, August 7). School Library Journal.

<http://blogs.slj.com/afuse8production...>

KWinks says

Really, it is 4 and 3/4 stars. Yes, it is THAT good. I could not put this down. Everything else had to suffer until I finished. It has been my goal lately to read more realistic fiction featuring male characters and I grabbed this one after reading a review. Oh, boy. This is one of those books in which you, as the reader, just want to reach into the book and give this kid a hug.

I am not going to recap the plot here, but I will add my thoughts. I will not get spoilery.

Frankie Joe is a sympathetic character that you adore right away. He is drawn to older folks, and that is very refreshing to see. In fact, one of the first new "friends" he makes is an older woman who is considered odd because of a birthmark on her face. The town itself is very charming.

One of the BEST parts of this story is the positive relationship between Frankie and his stepmom and father. Great male role models are missing from many of the stories I read. The birth mom is a whole other kettle of fish. The school system seems to really care about the kids in this story as well.

The only thing I was a little disappointed in was the ending, because I thought it was wrapped up really fast (a little too fast). I would have liked to have seen the process in which Frankie makes the choice to move in the direction he decides to move on in.

Otherwise, this one is near perfect.

Kris says

I loved this book! It was very sad at times, but the ending was what I hoped it would be. Anyone who works in a school knows some Frankie Joes. The descriptive writing of what he was going through after moving across the country to live with his father and his family, starting a new school, etc., all while missing his mom who was in jail, was so believable. His mom, as described in the book, was always chasing rainbows. His father was a responsible caring person. I only wish that all of our "Frankie Joes" had this situation and a loving, responsible parent to live with when things went wrong with the other parent. I believe the author must have had some personal insight into this type of situation.(less)

Kelly Thielen says

One of my favorite books of the year. Frankie Joe's mother has ended up in a bad spot - all a misunderstanding according to her - which lands her in jail. Frankie finds himself in a sticky situation. He is being forced to leave his friends, all retired older adults, who live in the Texas trailer park he and his mother live in and who have served as surrogate grandparents, taking care of him when his mother has neglected to. Now he is being sent to live with his father, step-mother and four half-brothers he's never met. From the time he leaves, Frankie is planning to escape even though he will be living half a country away from the trailer park.

Frankie's dad, FJ and step-mother Lizzie try to make things as comfortable as possible for Frankie, but he doesn't really give things a chance. He misses his mother, his lack of attendance in school the previous two years puts him back one grade with his super-bright and not very nice younger half-brother, Matt. The other kids call him names, led by Matt. He does make one good friend, a girl, who helps Frankie feel better about himself and encourages Frankie to expand his delivery service, which starts as a pizza delivery service to make money to fund his "escape."

Winter is quickly approaching and Frankie knows he will have to wait until spring to set his plan in motion. Will time hinder or help Frankie in his quest to return home to his mother and their friends?

Stanley says

I liked this book because it was very clear and not confusing. I wouldn't say that this book is beautiful but, it was a relatively easy read and not complicated. There was just one big plot and conflict and very few tiny conflicts in the major one. There also weren't that many characters and it was easy to understand what was happening. I also enjoyed it because this book has a main character that's different from everyone else and I like that part about it. The reason I didn't give it five stars is because the book isn't in a series, it's just by itself and it wasn't as satisfying. However, if it was in a series, I don't think I would read the rest of it because this isn't the kind of book that makes you have a lot of feeling for the characters. There's a lot of good things about this book, but there are still some down-sides. This book didn't have any cliff hangers and it wasn't that intense. It was still interesting to read, but it wasn't enough to make me never want to put it down.

Barb Middleton says

Ever bike in 32 degree weather? I have. I thought I was shaking my fist at old man winter. Then I hit a patch of ice, found my body levitating from the ground before gravity took over and slammed me to the pavement. I should have cracked my head on the ice. Or at least knocked the wind out of my lungs, but the padding from my backpack stuffed with clothes, two hats, two scarves, two mittens, two pants, and thick insulated parka cushioned my landing like a mattress. Freaky fast Frankie Joe is much more coordinated and younger than me so when he bikes year round making money on a delivery service, he doesn't have to worry about snow and ice slowing him down. In fact, biking is the only good thing that has happened to Frankie Joe. His mom's in jail and he's been sent to live with his dad and four stepbrothers. He has missed so much school that he's a few years behind the other kids in his class. Being 5 feet 9 inches tall doesn't help. When he's put back from 8th to 5th grade, his alpha male 5th grade brother, Matt, is bent on humiliating him. Matt was number one before Frankie Joe bumped him down to number two and he has no qualms about letting Frankie Joe know he's mad, from stuffing his shorts down the toilet, to insulting him, and more.

The development of the characters is one of the strengths of this book and the fact that Matt is a well-rounded antagonist who changes and learns from his relationship with Frankie Joe makes this story interesting and full of tension. The dad's rules-oriented personality is annoying but loving toward his son that he's trying to get to know after being out of his life until now. The dad goes a bit far with the responsibility rules but it makes him more real. Mandy is very outgoing and at times insensitive which is typical of young kids and Elsie Peachcott is a no-nonsense old lady who is quite endearing and also learns from her relationship with Frankie Joe. Frankie Joe's mom is insensitive but in a self-centered, irresponsible way. She

reminds me of the mom in *Turtle in Paradise*, by Jennifer Holm. The teachers at the school are insensitive and humiliate Frankie Joe. I hate this type of character, unless they are a buffoon. I know kids like teachers being dopes in books, but it hits too close to home for me as a librarian who teaches 42 classes every 10 days. Have I accidentally embarrassed a kid? Have I been unfair?

The only thing that made me scratch my head regarding the plot was that the librarian and Frankie Joe read, *Kidnapped*, together but according to the principal, Frankie Joe could only read at a 4th grade level after being tested. *Kidnapped* is not an easy read and Frankie Joe would have had a higher vocabulary than he displayed in the chapter where he read out loud in class. It doesn't take away from the story. I just wondered about it.

The emotional pull of this story, along with the humor to lighten it, will make it a winner with readers. The line where Frankie Joe says, "I cry because mom sold her remembrance of me" and the climax where Matt gets buffaloed by the fact that Frankie Joe doesn't want to be number one are touching. I even liked the information on farming - of course, the author weaves it in the dialogue and internal changes of the characters in a way that is very interesting. This is a well-written book and I will be looking to more tales from this author to stock our library shelves.

I did debate on getting studded tires on my bike, but decided I'd let old man winter get the last laugh. Except now I'm living in a subtropical climate so maybe I did get the last laugh.

Reading Level 3.9

Betsy says

Realistic fiction for kids has more baggage than other fictional genres for that age group. Fantasies and comedies and science fiction get to rely on the extraordinary to weave their tales. Historical fiction, meanwhile, has the nice veil of history in place to aid the writer in making their point. What does realistic fiction have? Reality. Cold, cruel, dead dogs and incurable disease-ridden reality. When people think of middle grade realistic fiction their minds sometimes go to deeply depressing works where horrible things happen to perfectly nice kids. Blame schools that equate misery with learning for that crime. My favorite works of realistic fiction move beyond obvious metaphors and big honking deaths to make their points in subtler, more amusing ways. No one's going to necessarily accuse Lutricia Clifton's *Freaky Fast Frankie Joe* of being a laugh riot, admitted. But with its appealing hero, recognizable cast of characters and strong plot this is one subtle little novel that wins you over before you even realized you needed convincing. Consider discovering it.

Here's a basic rule of thumb. Anytime you run into four boys named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, odds are you're going to find them less than saintly individuals. That's bad. What's worse is if you suddenly discover you're their big brother. Frankie Joe always led a life that he liked. He had lots of folks in the trailer park to watch over him and a mom that's a lot more fun than the ones that make their kids go to school every day. Everything was just ducky until she went and got herself arrested. Now Frankie Joe's father, a guy he's never even met, appears out of the blue and takes the boy to middle-of-nowhere Plainview, Illinois. The deal is that Frankie Joe will stay there for the ten months his mom's in the hoosegow, but ten months is too long for this boy. Not only are his newfound younger brothers a bother (particularly alpha male Matt) but his father's some kind of stickler for self-improvement. That's when a brilliant idea occurs. Frankie Joe's fast on a bike. Really fast. Freaky fast. What if he started a delivery service and earned the money he needed to buy

the stuff he'd use to get back to the old trailer park to wait out his mom? It's a crazy plan but he's sure it'll work. That is, if he can just harden his heart to Plainview and the people who are in it.

Foster boys of the The Great Gilly Hopkins ilk are, as far as I can ascertain, less common than foster girls in middle grade literature. For every Frankie Joe you'll find a dozen Home, and Other Big, Fat Lies or The Road to Paris titles. Why is it that foster girls are appealing but foster boys aren't? To be perfectly frank, Frankie Joe isn't really a foster kid either. He has a loving father and new family just sitting there waiting for him. The kind of situation many a kid would kill for . . . with the possible exception of the snarky younger sibs. Still, in many ways Frankie's a foster kid at heart. He can't connect to his new home, missing his old one, and rejects the family with members that reject him.

Kid and adult readers alike often find characters that stand out and ring true in the books they like the most. You don't have to be likable to ring true, though. Honestly the character that felt pitch perfect to me from the first line onward was Matt, Frankie's eldest little brother. He's great little villain, albeit a three-dimensional one that makes a believable change of heart. Hell hath no fury like a smarty-pants scorned. When Frankie removes Matt from the top of the family, and school, pecking order (inadvertently, I might add) Matt is convinced that Frankie Joe is working on becoming a permanent member of the family. The scene where Matt discovers Frankie Joe's ultimate plan is weirdly satisfying because the kid is just floored by the revelation that someone wouldn't want to be number one. There's a moment later where Frankie says to him, "I'm not sure being all you can be always means being number one, Matt." It's nice when the antagonist gets to have a bit of learning and growing alongside the hero, don't you think?

Not that there aren't off moments here and there. One librarian I know who read the book was baffled by the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles references. The book mentions the kids seeing the movie in the theater, which makes you wonder if the book's a period piece. There are cell phones in it, but these days a cell phone doesn't necessarily preclude the idea that the book takes place in the past. We've had cells for a while now. There's a Gameboy reference as well, though, and that confuses the issue a bit more. For me, these blips on the radar didn't throw me off too much, but I was a little unconvinced by Frankie Joe suddenly calling his father "dad" three pages from the end of the book. It's not that I wouldn't be able to see that development coming. I just needed a little more help getting there.

If Frankie Joe has any literary relations out there, his closest kin might be Joey Pigza. What Frankie Joe lacks in Joey's hyperactivity he makes up for in unreliable parentage and a world where he has to take his life in his own hands. And like Joey, Frankie Joe's greatest strength is his ability to win the readership over to his side of things. You may not agree with his logic or his plans, but you like the darn kid. Not just because he's put upon at the start, but because there's something open and honest and original about him. We don't run across too many perfectly nice and smart kids that skip school with reckless abandon in literature these days. Frankie Joe fills that niche and a couple others while he's at it. A good kid in a good book written for good readers with good sense. Worth a reread too, while you're at it.

For ages 9-12.

Jolene Knighton says

Although I am an adult - I like to read the books my children read. This one was outstanding. Brings up a lot of issues that a lot of children can relate to.

Michelle says

I might have actually bought this for my school library if it weren't nominated for Bluebonnet. It's not awful.

Strengths: A very likeable, realistic protagonist.

Weaknesses: Gaping plot holes. Even a child will realize your loving parents won't let you lay in bed for 8 days with no food or water because you're sad. The author's unclear about the differences among bike tires, frequently inventing reasons characters can or can't do something on a bike because of tires which have no basis in reality.

Comment: If I read the term "Chihuahuan Desert" one more time I will strangle you.

Sheila Welch says

Frankie Joe is a very appealing character. I found myself rooting for him to make it back to Texas and his mother even while I knew that wasn't likely to happen. Frankie tells his story in first person, present tense, which helps create a feeling of being there with this earnest family as they adjust to a new (temporary, hopes Frankie) member. The oldest half-brother is quite believable, and Frankie's unintentional place as the eldest son creates realistic tension between the two boys. Although it's a current-day story, it feels as if it's set in a slightly earlier time period. But that works for me. I remember moving to the Midwest and feeling as if I'd slipped backwards in time, so the Illinois setting is just right. Big farming is discussed along with county fairs and making quilts, which are part of the mix one hears in this area of the country. The ending is particularly strong and very engaging. I think readers who loved DEAD END IN NORVELT and OKAY FOR NOW will also appreciate this story.

Chris says

<http://www.booksinprint.com.leo.lib.u...#>

Professional Reviews
Freaky Fast Frankie Joe

Booklist

(April 15, 2012; 9780823423675)

Twelve-year-old Frankie Joe has a lot of new people in his life after his mom lands in jail and he is sent off to Plainview, Illinois: his father, the four half brothers he is now forced to live with, and a school full of kids all too ready to label the tall boy from Texas as a freak. Nevertheless, the hardworking Frankie Joe struggles through it all to emerge as a winning protagonist. At first the unhappy boy plans on using his trustworthy bike to haul himself back to Laredo. But as Frankie Joe starts a delivery service in an effort to make money for his secret trip, he gets to know his adopted town. The admiration and trust he finds from its disparate inhabitants (a lonely farmer, an elderly woman concocting cosmetics, a perky classmate) begin to change the

gangly boy's opinions, just as surely as the steady, no-nonsense affection of his father and stepmother. Readers who enjoy graceful, understated humor in their realistic fiction should find this right up their alley or corn field, as it the case may be.--Cruze, Karen Copyright 2010 Booklist

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*My review and ideas for classroom application:

What was a new learning, confirmed thinking or a surprise?

Much of this professional review confirmed my analysis of this inspiring, heart-felt story of Frankie Joe. Even though he was lonely and homesick, he forged ahead to do well in school, obey his father and step-mother, and even hatch a plan to return home to Texas. When he discovered his mother was content to have Frankie's new family adopt him, it took the no-nonsense affection of his father and stepmother (as Booklist describes) to guide him through the sorrow of this realization.

Many meaningful applications for an intermediate class could be made from this children's fiction book. First of all, the way it was written, in log form, could be a very motivational way to set up a writing assignment. The author wrote as Frankie Joe on random dates (yet in chronological order) with entries indicating time of day in order to give the reader a feel of a day in Frankie's life from morning to afternoon to evening. It would be engaging for some students to write in this format about their own lives or that of a made up character. Another writing example, was the writing of letters to and from his mother and the friends from the trailer park as a hook for writing friendly letters. Frankie also wrote interesting vocabulary on index cards and posted them in his room for remembering. A simple idea for a class, but could be very inspiring due to Frankie Joe's example. Lastly, the on-going list of what he would need for his escape-to-Texas plan could be turned into a list writing activity for students. For instance, the students might make a list for the following: camping trip, weekend at the beach, car trip from coast to coast, etc.

Part of the "Escape to Texas" plan required money to fund the purchasing of all the items on the list. Another writing activity could come from brainstorming the perfect part-time job for the students' talents and passions.

The topics of blended families and bullying could also be explored as a way to connect with students who have experienced these difficulties. This book represents the hope of not giving up in the face of hardship. Frankie Joe was believable as a child who experienced loss and pain, yet pushed through it to the other side with the help of love and admiration from his new family and friends.
