

Title: *Starfish*
Author: Lisa Fipps
Genre: Realistic Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Emily K., 7th Grade

Date Reviewed: August 18, 2022

Starfish is a realistic fiction book surrounding the story of an overweight girl named Ellie. Some focus points of this story include body positivity, overcoming fears, and standing up to bullies.

The story begins at the end of the summer, right before the start of a new school year. Ellie and her best friend, Viv, are sharing their last moments together at Ellie's house before Viv moves away to a different state. Ellie is not looking forward to going to school, and without Viv to support her, she is feeling more vulnerable than ever.

Ellie herself doesn't necessarily mind being overweight, but the issue is that others do. Whether at home or at school, Ellie is constantly being teased by not only her peers, but even by her own mother. Ellie's relationship with her mother was never a healthy one, but now more than ever, their closeness as a family has begun to seem more stained. Ellie's mother is especially concerned about her daughter's weight issues, and is always insisting on bariatric surgery and shaming Ellie in front of others, which can sometimes feel even worse than the comments from bullies that she receives while in school.

Ellie's life in school is just as bad if not as worse than her life at home the story. As I mentioned before, Ellie is constantly being teased at school. To cope with the difficult emotions that result from bullying, Ellie's parents arranged for her to talk with a therapist. At first, Ellie does not like going to therapy, but as time goes on, she starts to take comfort in sharing how she feels, slowly building up the courage, as well as the confidence, that she will eventually need to stand up to her bullies, including her mother.

Around the same time, Ellie is also beginning to make new friends, specifically with her next-door neighbor Catalina, who she first became familiar with during Viv's leaving party. Both Ellie and Catalina are bullied, Ellie for her weight, and Catalina for her ethnicity (Hispanic). Ellie finds comfort in Catalina, who sees Ellie not by the size of her stomach, or by her weight as shown on a scale, but instead as a person as deserving of love as anyone else in this world, regardless of her weight. Together, Ellie and Catalina learn to overcome difficulties that they wouldn't have been able to handle alone, discovering more about themselves along the way.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (nonfiction) keep you interested?

This book was a page-turner and definitely kept me interested! Especially in difficult parts of the story, such as when the bolts on Ellie's chair were unscrewed to make it seem as though she had been too heavy for the chair to support, I was always wondering about what would happen next, and how Ellie would respond to the given situation.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

I think the pacing of this book was just right. Not only did the plot move at a quick enough speed to keep me entertained, but the author also included a good amount of detail, both of which I think are very important to the structure of a story.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

Starfish is a generally easy read, and while much of it is centered around bullying, also instills many good messages upon readers and can help to teach children, especially those who relate to Ellie, body positivity. I would highly recommend this book to grades 4 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to children struggling with body positivity or are simply looking for an inspiring story about the challenges of middle school and learning to love yourself. But, overall, I would recommend this book to everyone.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Ellie, the main character, does mention bariatric surgery (a treatment for obesity that involves removal of the stomach to reduce food intake) multiple times throughout the story. This is a topic that not all readers may feel comfortable with.

5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!

This book was an amazing read that really took me through the ups and downs of Ellie's life, all the while keeping my eyes glued to the pages! I would highly recommend this book to anyone in search of an emotional, not to mention entertaining, middle grade novel!