Title: *Dress Codes for Small Towns*
Author: Courtney Steven*s*
Perspectives Category: Religion and Belief

Reviewer Name and Grade: Kylee K., 11th Grade
Date Reviewed: 9/19/2023

1. What is the main plot of this book?

The main plot of "Dress Codes for Small Towns" revolves around Billie McCaffrey, a teenager struggling with her identity in a conservative small town. Billie grapples with her feelings for both boys and girls, navigating the complexities of friendship, family, and self-discovery. Evidence from the book includes Billie's internal struggles as she reflects, "I wasn't sure whether I wanted to be Wesley or be with him, or if I wanted to be him or be him. I couldn't tell, and it scared me" (p. 72). This quote highlights the central theme of identity confusion and the protagonist's journey to find her true self amidst societal expectations.

2. Which character did you most identify with and why?

I identified most with Janie Lee, Billie's best friend, who serves as a pillar of support throughout the novel. Janie Lee's unwavering loyalty and acceptance resonate deeply, providing a relatable lens through which to view Billie's struggles. As with Janie Lee, I also try to be as supportive as possible to my friends.

3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?

The main message of "Dress Codes for Small Towns" centers on the importance of embracing one's authentic self, despite societal pressures and expectations. Billie's journey of self-discovery underscores this theme, as she grapples with her sexual orientation and gender identity. A poignant moment in the book encapsulates this message when Billie reflects, "I wanted to be me, but I didn't even know who that was anymore" (p. 150). This quote emphasizes the struggle for self-acceptance and the courage required to defy societal norms in pursuit of authenticity.

4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?

The main message of self-acceptance and authenticity is effectively integrated into the story, woven seamlessly into the characters' experiences and interactions. Rather than feeling preachy, the narrative offers nuanced portrayals of the characters' struggles and triumphs, allowing readers to empathize with their journey. A notable example from the book illustrates this integration when Billie's father reflects, "I want you to be happy, whatever that means for you" (p. 278). This quote exemplifies the supportive environment that encourages self-expression and underscores the book's message without being didactic.

5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?

In "Dress Codes for Small Towns," I found myself agreeing with the perspective that emphasizes the importance of self-discovery and personal autonomy. Billie's journey to embrace her true self

despite societal expectations resonates with the idea that individuals should be free to define their own identities. A scene from the book illustrates this perspective when Billie asserts, "I'm not a girl who likes girls. I'm not a girl who likes boys. I'm just a girl who likes people" (p. 231). This quote challenges binary notions of sexuality and affirms the value of self-determination in shaping one's identity.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

Reading "Dress Codes for Small Towns" reaffirmed my belief in the importance of acceptance and inclusion within communities. The novel's exploration of LGBTQ+ themes challenged societal norms and fostered empathy towards individuals navigating their identities. A reflective moment in the book highlights this reaffirmation when Billie realizes, "There's not a certain way to be gay. There's not a certain way to be anything" (p. 320). This quote underscores the diversity of human experiences and reinforces the belief in embracing differences with understanding and respect.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

While "Dress Codes for Small Towns" provides valuable insights into the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in small towns, it could have delved deeper into the intersectionality of identity. Specifically, the novel could have explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ characters from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, offering a more comprehensive portrayal of their challenges and triumphs.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

"Dress Codes for Small Towns" inspired me to delve deeper into LGBTQ+ literature and advocacy, prompting further reading and research on the intersection of gender identity, sexuality, and community acceptance. The novel's poignant portrayal of LGBTQ+ experiences sparked my interest in understanding and supporting marginalized communities with greater empathy and awareness.

9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?

I would recommend "Dress Codes for Small Towns" to readers who appreciate coming-of-age stories with themes of self-discovery, identity, and friendship. Young adult readers, in particular, may resonate with the protagonist's journey of navigating adolescence and grappling with complex emotions in a conservative small town setting. Additionally, those interested in LGBTQ+ literature and social issues will find the novel both poignant and thought-provoking.

10. What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?

Another book that would complement "Dress Codes for Small Towns" in the category of LGBTQ+ coming-of-age literature is "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda" by Becky Albertalli. Like "Dress Codes for Small Towns," "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda" explores themes of self-discovery and acceptance within the context of adolescence and first

love. Both novels offer heartfelt portrayals of LGBTQ+ experiences and celebrate the importance of embracing one's true self amidst societal expectations.