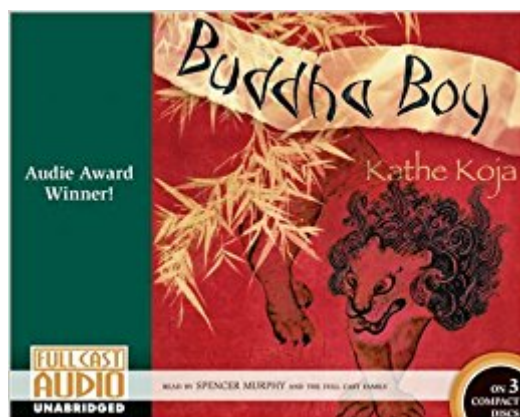


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Buddha Boy



Synopsis

With his shaved head and begging bowl the new kid is an automatic target for the bully boys of Edward Rucher High; an easy mark for their casual cruelty. Watching this, Justin would gladly stay as far from the newcomer as possible; until their economics teacher pairs them for a project and he finds himself becoming fascinated by the kid the others mock as 'Buddha Boy.' The thing is, friendship with an outcast always carries a price, and soon Justin must decide if he can stay silent in the face of what he knows. A scorching portrait of contemporary high school life, featuring a character listeners will never forget.

Book Information

Audio CD: 1 pages

Publisher: Full Cast Audio; 1 edition (September 1, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1933322209

ISBN-13: 978-1933322209

Product Dimensions: 1 x 6.5 x 6.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 35 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #7,420,105 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Religious > Other #1510 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Violence #3644 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Religious > Christian

Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10-Justin-an "average" kid-serves as the interface between readers (and to some extent his schoolmates) and Michael Martin, aka Buddha Boy, whose Buddhist teacher named him Jinsen, "fountain of God." Justin mostly wants to pass through high school unnoticed (beneath the notice of the school's "royalty"), doing his work and enjoying his friends. He is fortunate to have supportive, albeit divorced, parents-another facet of the novel that sets it apart in a field full of useless adults. But Justin is stirred out of his camouflage by the animosity that the new kid incites, quite unintentionally, simply by being different. Both irritated and intrigued by Jinsen's apparent imperturbability to his tormentors, Justin is also astonished by Jinsen's artistic abilities. Koja flawlessly walks a tightrope in her presentation of Jinsen-devout without being sanctimonious, insufferable, or simply unbelievable-and solidly nails the small-minded, fearful, and even paranoid

mind-set that dominates the high school milieu. Like Chris Crutcher and Chris Lynch, the author is deeply concerned with the psychological motivations for behavior and the belief that explicable causes generally underlie what may seem to be inexplicable actions. At the heart of her story is a deeply religious character who is neither naive nor clownish, neither self-righteous nor pitiful. Buddha Boy has a whole lot of action compressed into a short time span, but Koja admirably refuses to yield to melodramatic writing or black-and-white solutions. Quickly paced, inviting, and eye-opening, this is a marvelous addition to YA literature. Coop Renner, Blackshear Elementary School, Austin, TX Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Gr. 6-10. No one in the rich, suburban high school likes the weird new kid who looks like a Buddhist monk and begs at lunch. But Justin is drawn to the stranger and defends him against vicious school bullies. Koja's short novel is openly preachy, and the packed plot is absurdly contrived: the saintly outsider turns out to be an amazingly gifted artist who was once a delinquent as violent as the school bullies--until his parents died and he went catatonic and a Buddhist art teacher showed him how to find truth and beauty in art and religion . . . It's the simple writing, along with Justin's informal first-person narrative, that will draw readers to the crucial ethical issues, especially "the social-status in-out thing" among the kids, and the way school authorities accept it. Then there's the elemental question of how hard it is to do the right thing, and to keep on doing it. "We're all gods inside, right? Karma, right?" Teens will find much to talk about here. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Good narrator. It was a ya story that addressed bullying and how we participate in bullying culture, whether you're the bully or the bystander who never steps in. Its a bit cishet and white, the only inclusion is possible hints to buddhism from the new kid, but as a lover of ya, it wa good storytelling, I just would've loved more inclusion.

I am always on the lookout for children's and Young Adult books that introduce Buddhism and related spiritual themes in an accessible way, so that is how I happened upon this one (and I'm glad I did.) This slim novel (117 pages) centers around high schooler Justin and his initially reluctant friendship with 'new kid' Jinsen, who begs at lunch for food, wears old clothes, smiles all the time no matter what, and is widely derided as a 'freak' amongst the high school population. Jinsen's incredible artistic talents intrigue Justin however, and as he gradually gets to know him better, he

comes to appreciate Jinsen's profound spiritual values. The plot centers around others' treatment of Jinsen, and Justin's struggles to decide how or if he should try and help. It's very readable, and the high school environment and emotional struggles of the characters felt real to me. Although it touches on spiritual themes, the author does so with a light touch - the book isn't pedantic or preachy. Most of the themes come up in brief bits of conversations between Justin and Jinsen, or in the narrative added by Justin, who is telling the story in first person. On the plus side, this keeps the spiritual undertones from overwhelming the story or characters, but it also limits the amount of information we get regarding Buddhism. As someone who has studied Buddhism extensively, some of the statements regarding the Four Noble Truths, karma, and 'gods' (a word some Buddhist are very uncomfortable with) didn't resonate exactly right for me. I wasn't wild about Jinsen begging for his lunch either, as it seemed to play into certain stereotypes regarding Buddhism. But there are many branches of Buddhism, and so many interpretations, and as long as this book isn't read as a treatise on Buddhism, I think it is good. Certainly anything that gets tweens and teenagers thinking about tolerance and spirituality is a good thing in my view!

I am reviewing this on behalf of my teen who is entering high school. This was a requirement as part of an English course. According to her the book lacked interest and therefore was difficult to "get into" especially, to a teenager of this age. She didn't think the book was bad, but has read better. She also was thankful that the book was very short (about 14 chapters). The book seemed appealing to me, however, I did not read it, so I can only make comments based on her experience.

Great 9th grade summer read!

It's a good book, it came in the same condition I expected it in.

School assignment she actually didn't mind

Great book for kids to read.

I purchased this book to read with my 13 year old students and while it started out OK, nothing happened to keep their (or my) interest.

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