

## Oh, the Thinks You Can Think

# Princeless Volume 1: Save Yourself



[view in catalog](#)

Dragons, princesses, and adventure oh my! Welcome to *Princeless: Save Yourself* by Jeremy Whitley, in which damsels are very much not in distress, but rather rescue themselves, shattering gender stereotypes and poking fun at genre tropes throughout. Whitley has created a smart, incisive, and shockingly funny story that cuts deeply at the traditional conventions of fairy tales and fantasy. Whitley also manages to combat the whitewashing of the fantasy genre in this story as well, telling a diverse adventure tale involving characters of multiple ethnicities. While many stories would be bogged down by all of this stereotype smashing, Whitley's story soars, enthralling the reader and creating a dynamic story in the vein of *Brave* and *Frozen* that will appeal to both male and female readers. While there are instances of mild peril and brief bouts of comic violence, overall this story is one that will delight most readers. Suggested for children ages 9 and up who enjoy fantasy, fairy tales, humor, adventure, and characters who save themselves.

Our story begins, when the heroine, Princess Adrienne Ashe, decides she is tired of waiting to be rescued from her tower by a prince and convinces the dragon guarding her to aide in her escape. Once free, she decides to go on a quest in order to rescue her sisters, who have been squirreled away in towers of their own, accompanied by monstrous guardians. This drive fuels the story, and the subsequent three volumes in the series, but there are many other adventures and mysteries along the way. As our young heroine works toward her goal, she makes friends with a young dwarf blacksmith, Bedelia, who forges her an actually effective suit of armor (after much debate about what counts as armor), and begins to establish a reputation as a warrior. Ever-present in the story though, are the machinations of her father, King Ashe, as he plays his own game and works to track the runaway princess down.

Overall, an outstanding story that blends fantasy, fun, and adventure together into a delightful whole. The colors work together to create a vibrant story and the semi-cartoonish style keeps potentially tense moments light and adds additional humor to already comedic moments. As *Comics Alliance* said in their review, this is ?? the story Disney should've been telling for the past twenty years? and one can only hope that Whitley keeps producing these exceptional stories and showing that women can be adventurers, have pet dragons, defy stereotypes, and save themselves.

Posted by Sam O. on May 19, 2016

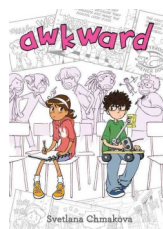
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# Awkward by Svetlana Chmakova



[view in catalog](#)

Fans of *Sisters*, *Roller Girl*, and *El Deafo* will feel right at home in this story. A coming-of-age tale that deals realistically with bullying, anxiety, school drama, friendship, and forgiveness is hard to find, yet somehow *Awkward* author Svetlana Chmakova manages just that. This story grapples with the real trials that children face in school and avoids offering easy answers, but instead tackles overcoming anxiety to make friends, find forgiveness, and build bridges. These heavy issues are all balanced by a strong current of drama and humor throughout the story that will keep readers flying through the pages, eager to know what happens next. Suggested for children ages 9 and up who enjoy realistic stories about school.

The story begins with our heroine, Peppi, falling prey to social pressure on her first day of school and participating in the bullying of a fellow student, Jaime. The rest of the story is in many ways driven by her desire to find forgiveness and make things right. As the story progresses throughout the school year, we watch Peppi try to reach out to Jaime and the ways in which anxiety and the social structures of school create barriers to this action. Additionally, anxious and shy Peppi is heavily involved in the art club, while introverted Jaime is in the science club and the competition between the two clubs for a spot in the school fair forms an ever-present backdrop for the story. As these two characters find common ground with one another, their clubs seem to grow farther apart, creating issues not only for them, but also the school. Trying to balance these many issues and still have a good year in school would be hard for anyone, and watching these characters grapple with them is the crux of the story.

The artistic style is strongly reminiscent of anime and the colors create a hazy, dreamlike quality that helps draw readers into the story. Chmakova's story tackles how it feels to be introverted and anxious, but she is also tackling the issue of separation between science/math and the arts and how this creates a false dichotomy that does not fully embrace the skills and interests of students. Overall, it is amazing for how many issues Chmakova manages to bring to light and it should not be missed, a truly excellent school story for the introvert in us all.

Posted by Sam O. on May 12, 2016

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# Red's Planet by Eddie Pittman



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Fans of *Zita the Space Girl* will feel right at home in this charming graphic novel. While the bulk of the story takes place in space, featuring aliens, strange planets, and the loss of shoes, it is fundamentally a story about belonging and identity. While there are some scenes of peril that might be too much for more sensitive readers, this graphic novel tells an accessible and interesting story that will appeal to children ages 8 ? 12 who enjoy action, adventure, and science fiction.

The story begins with our unnamed heroine, known only as Red, running away from her foster family only to be picked up by the police. However, before the police can take her home they are involved in a high-speed chase with a spaceship. Red ends up being mistakenly kidnapped and taken across the universe. There, she ends up in an auction hosted by an ancient creature known as the Aquilari, who collects rare and valuable artifacts from across the universe, but before the reader can learn more the ship is attacked by space pirates and crashes onto a planet nobody, not even the aliens, is familiar with. On this seemingly desolate desert planet, Red must learn to bond with her traveling companions, avoid the tiny, disproportionately hungry wildlife, and find a way to survive.

Funny and disarming, this story is a lighthearted romp through space. The colors and illustrations are vivid and dynamic, drawing the reader through the story. Pittman has an eye for color and knows how to use the art to enhance and provide comic relief for his text. While the plotting does need to be evened out for the sequel and there are several moments where the story seems to lag, overall Pittman has crafted a story that engages readers and leaves them eager to know what happens next for our stranded heroine.

Posted by Sam O. on May 12, 2016

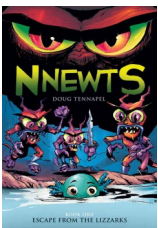
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## **Nnewts: Escape from the Lizzarks by Doug TenNapel**



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A war between amphibians and lizards, with humor, magic, and villains with mustaches. All of these elements can be found in *NNewts*, which introduces readers to a new series featuring a clash between amphibians, the Nnewts, and their scaly counterparts, the Lizzarks. Told in rich and vibrant colors, this graphic novel tells a beautiful, humorous, heart wrenching, and charming

story that will appeal to children 9 and up who enjoy tales of adventure and fantasy. The series opens on a young NNewt, Herk, whose legs are underdeveloped, which forces him to spend his days in the family pond fighting imaginary monsters, until the day the Lizzarks, commanded by the Snake Lord, attack. Herk's family is killed in the assault and he is forced to flee through underground waterways to escape. These events start Herk's epic journey as he tries to find those responsible for the death of his family. On this quest, he meets the first Nnewt, Anthigar, in his ruined, watery kingdom and learns what really happened to his legs. Herk also learns that his village was not the only Nnewt settlement and that there are darker, more sinister forces at work and somehow he is at the center of these events. Herk must look within and master new abilities if he is to save himself, the remaining NNewts, and defeat the evil Snake Lord.

Tennapel is grappling with many issues in this story, unabashedly dealing with death, purpose, and identity, but doing so in an accessible way. The artwork heavily relies on varying shades of green, red, purple, and orange to create a vivid and dynamic story that almost leaps off the page. While this tale does feature violence, it never veers too heavily into visual details and intersperses humor throughout to lighten the mood. This series quick space, vibrant colors, and engaging story could also draw in reluctant readers as they follow Herk's quest. While there are some elements of the plot that need fleshing out, overall this story is excellent and leaves the reader eager to read book two, *NNewts: The Rise of Herk*, available now.

Posted by Sam O. on March 11, 2016

[Nnewts: Escape from the Lizzarks](#)

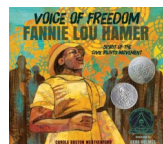
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## Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement



[view in catalog](#)

For a powerful and poetic glimpse into the life of a real-life American civil rights hero, look no further than *Voice of Freedom*, a 2016 Caldecott Honor book written by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated in beautiful collages by Ekua Holmes. Each haunting poem includes Fannie Lou Hamer's own words, and each tells of a formative experience in her eventful life. She was at the forefront of many important events in civil rights history, and sadly, like many black citizens of the U.S. both past and present, experienced brutality at the hands of cruel white people so severe that she was left with permanent injuries. Her ability to rise above incredible injustices and to be a leader for her people was second to none. Highly recommended for grades 4 and up.

Posted by Ellen A. on February 25, 2016

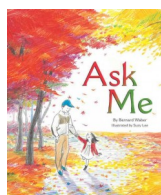
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# Ask Me: Bonding with Books and Stories



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*"Truly listening to someone reminds them that their lives matter; and reminds us all of what matters most."*

The statement above is included in a [short video produced by StoryCorps and Google](#) encouraging people to take part in StoryCorps' "Great Thanksgiving Listen." The [StoryCorps organization](#) aims "to provide people of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share and preserve the stories of our lives." This Thanksgiving, Storycorps encourages high school students, especially, to interview grandparents, or another older friend or relative, and use the StoryCorps app to record and share the interview. But you don't have to be in high school to take part. And taking time to talk with and truly listen to the stories our friends and relatives have to tell is a gift we can give each other at any time.

The picturebook *Ask Me* by Bernard Waber, echoes the message promoted by the StoryCorps initiative. Illustrated by Suzy Lee in rich red, yellow and orange colors, it shows a father and daughter enjoying the outdoors together on a lovely Autumn day. "Ask me what I like," the girl says to her father. And he does. And after she answers, he asks: "What else do you like?" encouraging continued conversation as they examine bugs and flowers, kick through fallen leaves and enjoy made up words like splashing and splooshing.

Throughout the peaceful story, the father gives his daughter his full and undivided attention. He's not trying to shop for groceries, clean his home, or check his phone for messages. He's listening and responding and encouraging his daughter's curiosity and letting her know that her words and stories matter to him; that what she thinks and says is important; that *she* is important to him. Reading to children also provides an opportunity to pause our busy lives and spend time together. Picturebooks, notable for their informative and appealing illustrations, often include a greater variety of words than we normally use as part of our everyday conversation. Reading and listening to picturebooks and other stories can help children increase their word knowledge - and world knowledge - as the subjects represented in picturebook format range from friends and family to rabbits and robotics.

And after you've finished the story, you can ask your listener: What do *you* think? What did *you* like best? What would *you* like to read about next?

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Posted by Lisa C. on November 25, 2015

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