



The Village School's Children's Book of the Month



Book reviewed by
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*(Proud parent of a Village
School student)*

'I, Emma Freke' By Elizabeth Atkinson

Author Elizabeth Atkinson welcomes us to the world of 12-year-old Emma Freke. A girl who in the previous year blended into the background at school, Emma is now too tall, too smart, with hair too red and a home life that's much too unusual. She lives in an apartment above the family's bead store with a self-centered, unpredictable mother, Donatella. Emma's father is a mystery and she finds herself being the family caretaker, parenting not only her mother but also her uninterested grandfather, Nonna, and his feeble dog, Eggplant Parmigiana. Her only true friend is Penelope who lives across the street and is two years her junior.

After being suddenly pulled out of school, Emma finds herself spending mornings homeschooling at the library and afternoons running the store alone. She is isolated, feels unworthy of friendship and has nothing to excite her. But one day she receives an invitation to the annual Freke Family camping reunion in Wisconsin. Packing her bags, she sets off on a personal voyage hoping to find family, a place she belongs and Frekes just like herself. What Emma ends up discovering however, surprises everyone and might even be more valuable.

The book is a heartwarming, mysterious and comic coming of age story. Through her journey, she discovers herself to be a tough, kind, loyal and powerful young woman. As the story begins, Emma believes she belongs nowhere and it ends with her realization that not only does she have a place in this world, but "fitting in" isn't all it's cracked up to be.

This middle school-aged chapter book is well written and a joy to read. If the title, "I, Emma Freke," doesn't grab you, the first chapter will hook you. It easily pulls you along and had me wishing I could adopt the fictional Emma. Its themes emphasize self-reliance, kindness and acceptance. I would recommend reading this along with your child, just for your own pleasure.

I hope to meet the author, Elizabeth Atkinson, at the Central Massachusetts Children's Book Festival on Nov. 14, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Mount Wachusett Community College and plan to ask her to sign a copy for my daughter. All are welcome to attend the Book Festival with children, it's free. For information on the Book Festival, go to centralmasschildrensbookfestival.org.