

Children's Book of Month October 2017

*As Brave as You* by Jason Reynolds

reviewed by 2nd-3rd teacher Shannon Johnson

“How come glaucoma isn’t called eyecoma? Technically, grandpop’s eyes are ‘sleep, right? Eye. . . coma makes more sense,” is entry number 456 in Genie’s notebook of questions—questions that he hopes to google someday to find the answers. Throughout the plot, we get to ponder with eleven year-old Genie about an array of ideas from why grits are called grits, to why flies go into a light that kills them, to wondering how teeth can reconnect to gums. He loves to ask questions and it is precisely this trait that leads to him to connecting and building a strong relationship with his grandfather. *As Brave as You* by Jason Reynolds tells the story of that summer and so much more. We witness a bit of a loss of innocence as Genie grapples with the possibility that his parents might get divorced and tries to figure out why Grandpop is so eccentric.

The beginning feels familiar—city boys go to stay for a month with grandparents in the country. North Hill, Virginia, is where they go, which Genie describes as “*country* country.” It certainly is a big difference from living in New York City. Genie and his older brother Ernie, who is quite the opposite of Genie, have to quickly adjust to waking up at dawn to help with chores, live without internet at the house and try to build a relationship with grandparents that they haven’t seen for years. It isn’t long before they settle into the groove of Grandma and Grandpop’s days.

As the plot unfolds, we learn about why Grandpop’s and Genie’s father’s relationship is strained and get a window into the past that explains some of Grandpop’s odd behaviors. As Genie builds his relationship with his Grandpop, he learns more about how his grandfather went blind, why he has a room filled with birds and why he’s afraid to travel outside of the house. Grandpop in turn puts his trust in Genie and begins a healing process of forgiveness for traumatic events that occurred in his past. It is not an easy path that they head down, but it's one filled with love and compassion.

The two brothers have a sweet relationship and as the summer days pass, they learn more and more about the people who live in North Hill. First they meet Teresa who they find on her porch pounding bottle caps (they learn that she creates jewelry with them to sell at a local market). They also meet some interesting townsfolk that Genie wonders about. The boys face some problems that they need to solve together and work to understand the world around them. Both boys face difficult challenges and have to make important decisions during their short stay.

*As Brave as You* is a page-turner and makes for a quick read. The characters are likeable and their stories, as they unfold, pull you in deeper. The well-written plot moves quickly and is interlaced with flashbacks as Grandpop tells Genie stories (mostly in the late hours of the night). This is a great read for ages 10 and over.