
SHOW ME A SIGN: YOUNG ADULT BOOK REVIEW

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Abstract

The author reviews the middle grade novel *Show Me a Sign* (2020) by Anne Clare LeZotte, providing a summary, character analysis and arguing for its accessibility to middle school readers.

Keywords: middle grades, deaf communities, Martha’s Vineyard, sign language, social attitudes toward disabilities

Anne Clare LeZotte wrote *Show Me a Sign* (2020) to share a story of a young, strong, deaf heroine. This story—based upon an actual community of deaf citizens who created their own sign language—takes place on the island of Martha’s Vineyard and also within the town of Boston during the early 1800’s.

The protagonist of this story, Mary Lambert, is clever and ambitious, and she is on a quest for truth. She suffers internal conflict as she mourns and blames herself for aiding in the accidental death of her only brother. She experiences conflict with her parents while the family attempts to cope with their grief; she experiences conflict with her best friend, Nancy, who possesses an opposing view of racial justice and equality; and finally, she faces major conflict with the antagonist of the story, Andrew, and his wicked accomplices.

Bostonian Andrew, a mad scientist in academic clothing, kidnaps Mary in retrieving a “live specimen” from her homeland as well as stealing the “map of memories” created by Mary’s late brother. Mary is a strong-headed character who will stop at nothing to retrieve the last tangible memory of her brother but suffers horrible abuse by the people in Boston who are not familiar with the deaf and treat them as animals, rather than human. Mary must suffer starvation, neglect, experimentation, and abuse in order to complete her journey, escape from her evil foe’s grip, and return to her homeland to share her experience to enlighten the others. Mary ultimately concludes that both her brother and her conscience are peacefully at rest and that the past will always remain as it is; however, the future holds opportunities for her to make a difference and help others.

Mary Lambert is near the age of many middle schoolers; for this reason, I believe this book would appeal to such an age group. Mary overcomes many hardships and completes a quest, adding to its appeal to middle schoolers.

This book is beautifully crafted and features several themes: the acceptance of disabilities, racism and social injustice, family tragedy, internal conflict, and self-realization in the coming-of-age. The only challenge that may arise from teaching this book could be its elements of racism and social injustice. However, as a new teacher, I would argue that the protagonist opposes hateful and ignorant characters while personifying strong beliefs about what is right and wrong, even when it goes against the beliefs and practices of others.

I love how the author is able to incorporate so many elements into this entertaining and educating literature. I love that middle schoolers can learn so many things through reading this story

of a memorable young heroine; and, I hope that they will do so as they gain some insight into the deaf and hearing-impaired community that may pique an interest in learning sign language.

Author Biography

Halle Harbers originated from Cherryvale, KS, and graduated from Pittsburg State University in May 2025. Post-graduation, Halle will teach 6th and 7th grade English in Cherryvale. Halle's favorite young adult author to date is Elizabeth Acevedo and favorite literature to teach is *Romeo and Juliet*. Halle lives with husband and sweet baby daughter named Thea, and can be reached at hharbers@gus.pittstate.edu.

