



## **The Things a Brother Knows**

*Dana Reinhardt*

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# **The Things a Brother Knows**

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**The story of a young marine's return from war in the Middle East and the psychological effects it has on his family.**

Finally, Levi Katzenel's older brother, Boaz, has returned. Boaz was a high school star who had it all and gave it up to serve in a war Levi can't understand. Things have been on hold since Boaz left. With the help of his two best friends Levi has fumbled his way through high school, weary of his role as little brother to the hero.

But when Boaz walks through the front door after his tour of duty is over, Levi knows there's something wrong. Boaz is home, safe. But Levi knows that his brother is not the same.

Maybe things will never return to normal. Then Boaz leaves again, and this time Levi follows him, determined to understand who his brother was, who he has become, and how to bring him home again.

Award-winning author Dana Reinhardt introduces readers to Levi, who has never known what he believes, and whose journey reveals truths only a brother knows.

## **The Things a Brother Knows Details**

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Author : Dana Reinhardt

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## From Reader Review The Things a Brother Knows for online ebook

### Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Jaglvr for TeensReadToo.com

Boaz is coming home. That's what the reader learns early on. Boaz is everything that the narrator, Levi, is not. Boaz was the star athlete at school. He could have his pick of colleges and scholarships. And (at least according to Levi), he had the most gorgeous girlfriend in the world. But against everyone's wishes, especially their parents', Boaz enlists in the Marines.

The Katznels had relocated to the United States from Israel. Boaz's parents can't understand his need to join the military. After all, they are not in Israel anymore, and in the United States, it's not mandatory to enlist. But Boaz has a need inside that he can't convey to his family.

Now, it is three years later, and Boaz is home.

THE THINGS A BROTHER KNOWS is told through the eyes of Boaz's high school brother, Levi. The two used to be close before Boaz started driving in high school. Now, Levi just wants to know what makes Boaz tick. Since Boaz arrived home, he's been locked in his room. Levi knows that something is wrong with his brother, but the rest of the family won't admit that Boaz has changed.

When Boaz asks to borrow Levi's computer, Levi begins to snoop at the web sites Boaz is visiting. Levi discovers that Boaz is planning a trip to various locations down the East Coast. But he can't figure out the final destination, nor what Boaz wants to do on the trip. Boaz tells their parents that he wants to travel the Appalachian Trail. Levi knows it's a big lie, but he's consumed with the "why" of the trip rather than anything else. Levi manages to catch up with Boaz on his walk, and the two brothers work their way to Boaz's final destination.

I have to admit that this is the first book by Dana Reinhardt I truly loved. I enjoyed HOW TO BUILD A HOUSE quite a bit, but THE THINGS A BROTHER KNOWS, I loved. Levi Katzen (what a great last name!) was a spirited, sarcastic (at times) character that you just had to love. He reminded me a lot of the characters that John Green creates. The story is definitely not an easy topic and very relevant in today's climate, but it was one that needed to be told. And is told well.

Levi's persistence slowly works its magic on his brother, and by the end of the story, all is revealed, though the ending may not be what the reader is expecting. There are highs and lows in the story that work beautifully together to tell the turmoil of one returning soldier, and the brother who loves him and wants to understand what happened to change him so much.

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### Lo says

I very much wanted to give this book a higher rating, but I think couldn't because some parts of it annoyed me.

I've read Dana Reinhardt's other books and thought they were really good (of course, I read them back when

my taste wasn't so good, so you never know), and already got used to the author's strong female main characters. I feel like because this book was narrated by a guy main character, Reinhardt changed up her style to "fit a guy's point of view." While I'm okay with the change, I didn't like how she kept differentiating between women and men. I didn't notice this in any of her other books, and if it indeed did show up in them, I didn't notice it as much. Though this might be more of a personal political view, there really is not that much of a gap between the genders. In fact, there really isn't one at all. It's society that has taught us there is one, when no such gap or boundary actually exists. The author kept trying to maintain the idea of differences in genders, and I think she might've actually chosen to do a guy's point of view because they're supposed to be strong and not cry, and it's embarrassing when they do.

I also didn't like any of the characters very much. Levi (the main character) and his older brother were okay, because they actually seemed realistic, but everyone seemed flat; they only had one side to them. Pearl, one of Levi's best friends, was supposed to appear as the perfect, wild streaked, most understanding best friend ever, but seemed fake and unreal. Zim, another one of Levi's best friends, must've been described somewhere, but I can remember almost nothing about him except that there was a girl he hooked up a lot who was not his girlfriend. And Celine, the love interest, while being extremely pretty, is also extremely explosive and reckless, which didn't fit Levi's quieter personality. It wasn't an "opposite-attract" thing either; I just really didn't think they worked well together.

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### **Abby says**

This book kind of disappointed me. I loved the concept of the book, but I felt like certain parts could have been developed more, and other parts could be cut completely. For instance, Richard and Pearl really don't add much to the overall story. Richard annoys me because they call him "Zim" and he has the same birthday as the narrator. Generic characteristics of book friends. Pearl is slightly better, but still not that interesting (although I appreciated that she went to all girls school). They're kind of like comic relief, and then they end up in a predictable romantic relationship that adds nothing to the story. The main character, Levi, also has an unnecessary romance with a character. There's just a bunch of forced romance that has nothing to do with the main story, which I believe should have been completely focused on the relationship between two brothers. Maybe I'm just a sucker for siblings, but seriously, I would have enjoyed reading more about Levi and Boaz. There should have been some more background on their childhood. Little flashback snippets or something along those lines. Background would also have been helpful because these characters don't feel very real to me. Levi seems way younger than he is - he turns 18 in the book, and it seems like he's 14 at the oldest. Levi's friends absolutely adore him when there is really nothing interesting or appealing about him to suggest why. Supposedly, skateboarding used to be more important to Levi than anything, but it's said more in passing, and it doesn't hit as hard as it should when he's eventually given a skateboard. The book just focuses on all the wrong things. I went in expecting heartbreakingly brotherly bonding and finished feeling absolutely nothing. However, I was pleasantly surprised to see that Markus Zusak (author of The Book Thief) helped the author with this book! Without him, it probably would have been way worse. So thanks, Markus Zusak. You're the real MVP.

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### **Sesana says**

Levi's brother Boaz joined the Marines at age 18, a sudden and surprising decision for him. He comes back after three years at war as Bo, who sleeps on the floor, hides in his room at all times, and refuses to ride in a

car anywhere. There absolutely needs to be books about this, because how many people see a brother, a husband, a son, a cousin, or a friend go to war and come back a different person? The basic plotline is a good and important one.

What didn't connect for me were the characters. Boaz himself remains an unexplored cipher until the very last page. I never feel like I understand him any more than I had on page one. Levi is the only character I felt any connection with at all. Pearl, one of Levi's friends, felt bizarrely more like a guy's idea of a perfect girl-who-is-a-friend than an actual girl. Bizarre, because this isn't a male writer. It probably has more to do with the very thin characterization pretty much everybody got. There's also two romances that come entirely out of left field and are completely unimportant to and even detract from the plot itself. They also have zero development and come essentially out of nowhere.

Probably people who find this story familiar and relevant to their own lives will enjoy it much more than I did. And there is potential here, but it needed better characterization and less superfluous romance. Not every YA needs to feature the main character making out, guys.

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### **Mark says**

Levi is a junior in high school, and as the novel opens, his older brother, Boaz, is returning home from his tour of duty with the marines, in Iraq. Boaz has been gone for a long time (after enlisting right after high school), and has effectively cut off communication with his family. Upon his return home, those communication lines are still cut. Boaz spends all his time in his room, and Levi knows that he's working on a plan involving the computer and maps, but has no idea what it could be.

When Boaz announces that he's going to leave home for a while, to hike the Appalachian Trail, Levi knows it's a cover for some other journey. Levi, with the help of his friends, begins to follow Boaz, to try to discover what his final destination is, and what happened to the older brother who left home years before, if he still exists at all.

I have never found a Dana Reinhardt book that I didn't like. No, love. She is, for me, one of the best YA authors out there, and her work consistently wows me for the same reasons. She is a master with dialogue; the words on the page play in my head as I read, and it's as if I'm there in the middle of the conversation. Her stories are built around relatively simple plots, that reveal incredible complexity and interwoven relationships as the book progresses. And every couple of pages, she writes a sentence or phrase that makes me go back, read it again, and marvel at her craft.

There are a number of good YA books being written about the war in Iraq/Afghanistan (Myers' *Sunrise Over Fallujah* comes to mind immediately), but this one wrestles with the complicated issue of a soldier coming home. Perhaps I appreciate a book like Reinhardt's more, because I have a soldier in my family, who I've seen leave, return home, and leave again, like so many other families have done with their own sons and daughters. I've seen the changes that occur, and the way the notion of "home" is forever altered by that person's absence, and then their presence. This is a beautifully-written book, as all of Reinhardt's are, and I think teachers would be wise to read it, and consider how it can be used to discuss themes of family, or personal journeys; a cross-curricular unit with social studies could also benefit greatly from a book like this.

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### **Joe says**

A well-written teen novel about soldiers returning home and the families who await them. Boaz left home three years ago to enlist and fight in an unspecified foreign war. His 17 year old brother Levi is struck by how different the returned Boaz is from the outgoing, popular boy that left. Written from Levi's perspective, the author explores multiple relationships in order for each brother to realize what they know about each other and themselves. This isn't a long book, and much of the story is building up to a climactic final chapter. Unfortunately, the ending doesn't quite match the anticipation.

This book was required reading for my son entering 9th grade. In a way, it's an *easy* pick for high school classes - the multiple relationships provide a wealth of material for discussion and assignments. Much time will be spent in class examining Boaz, Levi, and their friends and family. Still, wouldn't it be great if someday teachers assigned required reading that teens **loved** and begged for more when school began?

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### **Jamie says**

Jamie Poorman

APA Citation: Reinhardt, D. (2010) *The Things A Brother Knows*. New York: Wendy Lamb.

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction.

Format: Print (Hardcover, 245 pages)

Awards: Recipient of the Sydney Taylor Book Award

Recipient of the California Book Award

Named one of Kirkus 2010 Best Books for Teens

School Library Journal 2010 Best Books of the Year

Booklist Children's Editors' Choice List

One of NPR's five best teen books of the year

ALA Top Ten Best Fiction for Teens list

## Selection Process: Booklist and School Library Journal starred reviews

Levi and Boaz are brothers - separated by 4 years and a world of experiences - the children of Isreali immigrants growing up in a Boston suburb. After high school graduation, Boaz stuns the family, his girlfriend, and high school buddies by enlisting in the military. Now, four years have passed and Boaz is home. Sort of. . . He is not the brother that Levi remembers. Boaz is sullen, moody, hardly ever speaks to anyone and rarely participates in routine family activities, like eating dinner together. Levi didn't understand Boaz decision to leave - to disrupt the family, worry their mother - and certainly doesn't understand this new Boaz.

When Boaz tells the family that he is leaving again - this time to hike the Appalachian Trail - his mother is thrilled, happy to see him finally taking an interest in something, anything again. Levi, however, has suspicions that Boaz is up to something and begins to make plans, secretly, to go with Boaz. He hacks into Boaz email, looks at the internet browsing history after Boaz uses the computer, and determines that Boaz is not hiking the Appalachian Trail but is walking to Washington, D.C.

Enlisting the help of his two best friends, Levi convinces his parents that Boaz has invited him along. Levi meets up with Boaz at one of his first stops on his route. Boaz is not happy to see him, but Levi is persistent and follows along the next morning. It takes several days, and many, many miles of walking, but the boys finally begin to reconnect and establish a sense of comraderie. Levi begins to realize the depths of Boaz post-traumatic stress disorder including his aversion to riding in cars as Boaz talks about his experiences in Iraq, including an instance where his humvee ran over a mine and was blown up.

Levi mistakenly believes that Boaz's destination is a rally in support of the troops and invites the whole family to meet them there. In reality, Boaz is headed to visit a friend who lost his legs in the humvee explosion and attend an event dedicated to the victims of the war. At the event, many people are placing memorials to American soldiers. Boaz, however, steps to the podium and shares a story about shooting a vehicle of Iraqi teens, mistaking them for enemy troops, and adds their names to the list of victims. After the service, the boys' father offers them a ride home but Boaz refuses, saying he is going to walk back to the military hospital and check himself in for treatment. Levi throws his arm around Boaz and offers to walk back with him.

This is a powerful coming of age novel that touches on so many themes - from growing up and finding a place in the world, to the horrors and repercussions of war. Reinhardt does an extraordinary job of placing the reader inside Levi's thoughts - the relationship and issues with Boaz are interspersed with thoughts of friendship, basketball, sex, cars, girls, . . .

Highly recommended

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### **J.E. says**

I don't often enjoy YA fiction, but I won't rule it out if it looks like a good story. Actually, I'm finding that I like YA realism in a stand alone format where there is little or no romance.

Anyway, I picked this up mostly because I saw the name "Brother", and then I fell in love with the cover. After I read the synopsis I had to take it home. I picked up this book at 11:50 last night because I was tired,

but not ready to go to bed and I needed something a bit lighter than "On Writing" to help me settled. I finished three hours later with misty eyes and a conflicted heart. I might have dreamed of it.

This book tackles some really tough topics like war, PTSD, family love, and what it means to be a man.

Firstly, this doesn't often factor into my reading, but this is very diverse book. The MC is an Isreali boy, son of an Immigrant and the American woman he fell in love with. That fact seeps through the entire narrative without being entirely essential to the plot. There is also a Chinese girl who was adopted at ten. Disabled characters. And realistic depictions of people of all ages, including the MC's grandfather (one of the biggest faults I find in YA lit today is the tendency to demonize adults and older people as being "backward" and "stuck in their ways" or in some cases, even dangerous and hateful)

I also feel like the depictions of a soldier with PTSD in this book is very accurate. PTSD is a bit of an overused trope in fiction, but it tends to be very convenient. In other words, the MC can be really emotional at a moment and have a nightmare or something, but it doesn't effect them outside of a chance for the author to dump some random emotional backstory that has nothing to do with the text. It's one reason why I'm often nervous to read a book with a character who has PTSD. This book showed other sides, mostly from a family perspective. Things that I've heard from people I am close to who's family members returned from war.

The MC's older brother locks himself in his room, refuses to eat, stops talking to his family, throws around hateful comments and lashes out at his parents and brother, keeps secrets, refuses to ride in a car, has night terrors, dissociates regularly, lashes out physically (even when he's not dissociating or dreaming, which is something a lot of depictions don't take into account) and relives events in ways other than the oh-so-tropey "flashback episode". (I.E. with physical sensations, confusion, dissociation, and a heightened "fight or flight" response.)

I love how this books added all these things, and did talk about the actual events that caused this behavior, but didn't focus on the backstory. Instead it focused on the MC, his emotional journey in growing up in a way that he could take care of his brother, and the complexity that these issues really bring up.

Which brings me to the final point. This book doesn't take a stance. The book shows both sides of the coin. People who wave the flag and claim that the soldier character is a hero, and suddenly care about his family where they never did before. And also characters who don't support the war. And in the MC character's family, there are actually a lot of conflicting feelings on this. the MC himself goes on a journey where he steps away from his antipathy in the situation and can see the human side to the war. Not "pro-war or anti-war" as he says multiple times.

Don't get me wrong, this book has a few issues. There are a couple of missteps. But they do not take away from the whole. I wasn't a huge fan of the POV style the book was writing in, but it did remind me of one of my favorite books as a child and sure enough, the author thanked Markus Zusak in the end. The author of the book I so fell in love with.

I'll admit, this book plays all my favorite tropes, so I might be a bit slanted on it. But it's rare that I find a book that is both really entertaining, and realistic. I highly suggest it, especially if you are an author who wants to write characters with PTSD or character dealing with loved ones with PTSD.

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## **Jorge Perez says**

*The Things a Brother Knows follows the story of seventeen year old Levi, whose older brother, Boaz, had just returned home after serving in the U.S. military for three years. Levi noticed that his older brother was different than what he was before he left home. After investigating what his older brother was up to, he found out that Boaz is leaving home again to meet up with people that Levi doesn't recognize. Levi decided to follow Boaz without him knowing in order to uncover his mysterious motives. The book was good, in my opinion, and the book delves into the idea of what a brother means. The book was easy read and used language that is commonly used today. I also liked the character development in the book. For example,*

*throughout the book Levi developed as a character in that he didn't really liked how his brother was a different person in the beginning of the story, but came to understand what his brother has been through and why he was like that way. Overall, the story was good and I quite enjoyed it.*

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### **Jjarndt says**

The Things a Brother Knows, by Dana Reinhardt, is about a brother that goes off into the marines during the Iraqi war. Boaz decides to leave his family behind, going off to fight a war no one really understands. When Boaz finally returns, Levi, the main character, and Boaz's younger brother is worried about Boaz. Boaz is now distant from everyone, stuck in his room, only coming out to eat. When Boaz finally leaves his room he tells his family he is going to travel the Appalachian trail. Levi, however does not believe this, and decides to follow his older brother. Together with his brother, Levi travels to an unknown destination, learning slightly more about what happened to him along the way.

How would you feel if your older brother returned home from a war, in which you constantly fear he won't come back, and now he completely separates from everyone close to him. This novel expresses the change in the people who join the marines, and especially the ones who are thrown into the middle of a war. It also expresses the emotional strains it puts on the whole family. If anyone has any kind of relationship with someone in the military, this book is perfect.

The novel brings up the controversial issue of the war on terrorism. However, support or distaste of the war is not needed in order to read this. This book focuses on the family problems, more than the actual war.

Every parent is frightened by the thought of their child going off into war. The connections to the Iraqi war in this novel helps people understand the family strains. I recommend this novel to anyone who has any kind of relation with someone in the military.

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### **Jan says**

**Summary:** Levi's older brother Boaz has returned from a tour of duty in the "war on terror." Levi and his family are puzzled by his behavior; he is remote and uncommunicative, shutting himself up in his room all day and refusing to rejoin family life. Levi is frustrated with his brother and feels anger and dislike towards him for acting this way. Luckily he has the support of his friends Pearl and Zim. Levi sneaks into his brother's room and finds maps with mysterious markings. When Boaz announces that he is planning to hike the Appalachian Trail, Levi decided to take a road trip and see if he can catch up with Boaz at one of the locations marked on the map. When Levi meets Boaz, he decides to follow him to his destination, Washington D. C. But he has no idea what Boaz wants to do there. As they journey together, Levi comes to a new understanding of what his brother has been through and re-connects with his love for his big brother.

**Plot/Setting:** The plot is well crafted. The reader is eager to find out what is going on with Boaz, particularly in light of a mysterious object that he won't let anyone touch. The road trip contains surprising and unexpected romance for Levi. The "soldier returning home" theme is very relevant, especially to today's teens who may end up fighting in it. The romantic aspect adds to the appeal. Road trips seem to be the coming of age ritual in contemporary YA novels and this one is a great journey of discovery for the characters. It was interesting to me that Levi's family had emigrated from Israel, as it added an interesting twist.

**Characters:** I liked the complexity of the characterizations. Levi is disgusted with his older brother for falling off the pedestal. Boaz is an enigma at first, but as the road trip progresses, we (and Levi) gradually begin to understand him a bit better, although there are still many unanswered questions. It was a realistic depiction of

an older/younger brother relationship. The sassiness of Pearl makes her very likable.

Style: The writing is first person narrative and effectively conveys the tension of Boaz's return and how Levi's anxious cynicism evolves towards a more positive, hopeful understanding of his brother and family. This is an accomplished novel that addresses the relevant issue of soldiers returning from a war that is increasingly murky in its goals and objectives. How do they assimilate back into ordinary family life? Levi's initial reaction to his brother is one that teens will understand. Levi's journey of discovery and new acceptance is satisfying to the reader.

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### **Cara says**

I've always been interested in how the relationship between guys works, especially brothers. It's a relationship I can't experience myself, so my interest is peaked when I see a book about brothers.

In this story we have two brothers, Levi and Boaz. Boaz is the older brother who is perfect in every way, well at least in Levi's eyes. Their family is surprised by Boaz's decision to join the Marines and fight in the Iraq war. They plead with him not to go, but his mind is set, he's going. It's been a whole year now and Boaz is coming back home. Levi can't help but feel that things won't be the same as they were. Their mother always on edge and Boaz hardly had any contact with them while he was overseas. When Boaz returns he locks himself in his room, and for reasons unknown is planning a trip on foot. Levi has the great need to find out if he can find the brother he used to know, or maybe find out how to live with the new one.

I'm glad the author chose to do it from the younger brother's point of view. It gives the unique view of how much war affects not only the people in the front lines, but also the family and friends they have back home. They all have to deal with the new people they have become when they come back. It's hard for Levi to understand what Boaz has gone through because Boaz just clams up, but my hat goes off to Levi because even though it seems like it's hopeless he keeps trying.

The author also did a good job of describing Levi's life: his mom, dad and grandpa, Jewish lifestyle, and loyal friends Pearl and Zim. If you are looking for a pro or anti-war book, this isn't the book you are looking for. The book doesn't take a stand on either side, but focuses on the relationship of brothers and how they don't always have to be bonded by blood. Even though Boaz and Levi won't be the same, they'll be ok; it's just one of the things a brother knows.

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### **Elizabeth B says**

This is one of those books I think everyone should read. As a wife of a military man and coming from a long line of military folks, I'm already biased toward this book. That said, I'll admit that this book was hard to get into at the beginning. It moved slowly, was a bit confusing and aggravating the way nothing seemed to happen or change. BUT, thinking back on the times I've faced similar circumstances of soldier homecomings, this is exactly what it is like. The author has done an amazing job of portraying the confusion, waiting, desperation and frustration that a family feels with a soldier's homecoming. The "road trip" portion of the story was lovely. Perhaps a bit unrealistic for the majority of soldiers but, in this case, was written with strong enough characters to pull it off. Although it seems to end abruptly, to anyone having gone through something similar it will be familiar: there's a point where you either give up or move on. Poignant story,

would be fabulous if more people would read it and understand that sometimes even heroes fall, even if it's only done in the privacy of their own home with only their family as witnesses.

(Read and reviewed for Arkansas Teen Reads Awards)

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### **Nina says**

I could easily read another couple hundred pages of this, but at the same time I think it's just long enough. It's concise, but beautifully written in its dryness - the kind of writing that once in a while just hits you with a particularly piercing and visual sentence.

It tells the story it wants to tell - nothing more, nothing less - in about three hours of reading. It's complete, but clearly, tangibly just a beginning.

The relationship between siblings is something that's always fascinated me, and I love the way it's portrayed here, because it feels real; as far as I know, it *is*, and if it isn't for everyone, I know for certain that it is at least for someone.

The entire Katzenelson family is one you grow to feel for an incredible amount, despite spending so little time with them in terms of pages.

Levi in particular is a wonderful character - pretty much an average kid, delightfully normal, but more than a little amazing in his own right, brave and funny, but not in a showy, deliberately humourous way.

And Boaz. Honestly? I still know fuck-all about Boaz.

But I love him. That right there says something about the strength of this story as a novel and as a collective portrait.

Picking their relationship back up and working through the space that has come between is an extremely difficult process for Levi and Bo, and the way Reinhardt narrates it you can feel it in your bones. And that - that's what makes the resolution (that is not actually a resolution but will satisfy you all the same) all the more rewarding.

It's a delicate but concrete story about friendship, brotherhood and change, with the war in the background - a silent, but imposing background.

It's the kind of story everyone should read.

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### **Riley says**

I am currently on page 46 of 242 in *The Things a Brother Knows*. So far I have enjoyed the book since it fits my tastes and is a realistic fiction book. I will give a brief idea of the book so far without any spoilers. This book is about a boy whose intelligent and successful brother enlists in the marines rather than going to any high level college of his choice. The book doesn't show what happened during the war, but what happened after. His brother won't leave his room and has changed a lot since the war. The book does a great job illustrating the emotional challenges of war and definitely gets you thinking.

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