



Superstar

Mandy Davis

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Perfect for fans of *Fish in a Tree* and *Wonder*, this uplifting debut novel from Mandy David follows space-obsessed Lester Musselbaum as he experiences the challenges of his first days of public school: making friends, facing bullies, finding his "thing," and accidentally learning of his autism-spectrum diagnosis.

Lester's first days as a fifth grader at Quarry Elementary School are not even a little bit like he thought they would be—the cafeteria is too loud for Lester's ears, there are too many kids, and then there's the bully.

Lester was always home-schooled, and now he's shocked to be stuck in a school where everything just seems wrong. That's until he hears about the science fair, which goes really well for Lester! This is it. The moment where I find out for 100 percent sure that I won.

But then things go a bit sideways, and Lester has to find his way back. A touching peek into the life of a sensitive autism-spectrum boy facing the everydayness of elementary school, *Superstar* testifies that what you can do isn't nearly as important as who you are.

Superstar Details

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From Reader Review Superstar for online ebook

Hannah Ens says

Thoroughly enjoyed this look at the trials of adjusting to a new normal. Not only is Lester starting public school for the first time as his mom resumes work, but he learns that his brain works a little differently from most people. He's not the only one struggling with carving out normalcy - his mom is still working through the grief of her husband's death (which was a very public affair in a fictional scenario mirroring the Challenger space shuttle disaster), and his new school friend has to navigate a new baby brother and the deceit of popularity. I appreciated how the autism diagnosis didn't change Lester's identity - it's used as a way to explain why he acts differently without deeming any one person better than the other, and the resulting IEP actually frees him from feeling overwhelmed by his new school. I can't speak personally to the accuracy of the presentation of high-functioning autism, but I recognized the fixation with details and routine, attachment to an object and area of interest, and trouble communicating emotions as being part of that. The first-person POV was insightful, since most readers will be able to understand the emotional connections that Lester misses.

Margaret Boling says

12/16/2017 ~~ Lester is a superstar! His voice is believable, and I appreciated his growth over the course of the book. I really liked his fascination with science and the way he leveraged that fascination to find his niche in the classroom hierarchy. Lester's literal interpretation of other characters' directions added endearing humor to the story. I was also struck that nearly all the other characters showed growth as well. When I was only partway through the book, I was annoyed that the school seemed to have no clue about how to handle a child with special needs; that, however, was addressed later in the book as Lester himself experienced the resources his school could bring to bear. Another small quibble was that the characters seemed to show more growth than was credible in a 7 week span of time; however, compressing this timeline made the pace of the book better. This will be a read-alike to *Chester and Gus* by McGovern, *Out of My Mind* by Draper, *Wonder* by Palacio, and *Fish in a Tree* by Hunt.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC from Edelweiss Above the Treeline

Lester's father was an astronaut who was killed during a mission, so he has been raised and home schooled by his mother. When his mother gets a job at the local public library, Lester is thrilled because he loves to spend time there, but she tells him that instead, he will have to go to school. Lester has a lot of trouble with this-- he gets hungry and is not allowed a snack, he can't study what he wants when he wants to, noises overwhelm him, and the other children, picking up on his odd behavior, are mean to him. There is one girl, Abby Chin, who is friendly to him and tries to help him navigate the difficult waters of fifth grade. Abby had won the science fair the year before, and Lester is very excited about the fair, especially when his mother finally gives him permission to do a flight themed project instead of one on plants. When a new girl arrives and Abby starts to hang out with her, Lester's behavior becomes more erratic. Luckily, the school tests him and finally delivers a diagnosis so that Lester can get the help and support that he needs.

Strengths: This had a very authentic voice, and Lester's behaviors are ones that I see all of the time at school from our children in the autism spectrum unit. The story moved along nicely, and the characters were all realistic and engaging. I particularly liked how the classroom teacher wasn't thrilled to have Lester, but made sure that he got the attention he needed. Actually, the reactions of the staff were all spot on. They were surprised at first, but once they realized what was going on with Lester, started the process of getting him help.

Weaknesses: It seemed unlikely that Lester's mother would not have figured out that he was on the autism spectrum before he started school. Fifteen years ago, I could see this being the case, but today children are usually diagnosed at much younger ages.

What I really think: This will be good to use with Baskin's Anything but Typical and other titles with characters who are on the autism spectrum.

Beth says

It sagged in the middle but had a strong start and finish. I particularly liked how it dealt with unkindness from the other children -- almost everyone was revealed to have either some redeeming quality or at least understandable issues (except maybe Mona). Since the boy was practically a poster boy for "Autism looks like this" it did take an astonishingly long time for the school (or the mother!) to wonder about it, but eventually they got their act together.

Kris Patrick says

Proud to say a former Hamilton Southeastern Schools teacher gave Lester his beautiful mind and voice.

Ryn Lewis says

Public school is full of new challenges for Lester, a fifth-grader on the autism spectrum, who has been homeschooled all his life. When his mother must go back to work after the death of his father on a space mission, Lester must try to figure out all the new rules of school and how to navigate successfully amongst bullies, social situations and teachers who don't always announce there's been a change of plan. Fashion designer Abby and a sympathetic Michael V. come alongside Lester to support and encourage him in spite of his differences, but then the science fair and an undiscovered talent for kickball give Lester his chance to shine.

A character-driven novel, Superstar gives a fresh and unique look inside the head of a child on the autism spectrum. Davis manages to avoid some of the common pitfalls of an MC with autism, and writes Lester with a warm, relatable voice, making his choices and reactions sensible for his feelings, and sympathetically conveying his confusion over common social norms, without justifying his frequent lack of empathy for his friends. Lester is able to grow and learn with help from his peers, while still remaining realistically unique. Lester's fascination with space and science, and the creative ways in which his particular obsessions are used to drive the story forward make this a very enjoyable read. Give to fans of Wonder, Rain Reign and Counting

By Sevens.

Tereza Eliášová says

Superstar je výjimečná knížka o výjimečném tématu. Autismus je docela v kurzu, knih o něm a o lidech, kterých se týká, te? vyšla celá spousta a všechno je to asi zajímavé ?tení. Superstar je middlegrade, takže cílí na mladší ?tená?e než t?eba knížky od Paseky, ale i tak podle m? stojí za pozornost. Hlavní hrdina vás bude ur?it? hrozn? vytá?et, ale to byl asi autor?in zám?r, jak jinak :) Pokud vás bavil (Ne)oby?ejný kluk nebo Marcelo ve skutečném sv?t?, ur?it? byste po Superstar m?li sáhnout.

Hoover Public Library Kids and Teens says

Autism gets the unsentimentally sensitive treatment it deserves in Davis' debut. [from Kirkus Reviews]

Sue says

Mandy Davis knows kids... knows teachers.. knows the school day and autism... I'm so glad I got to hear her speak and that she pursued becoming a writer... she's a natural... following Lester through his struggles after being home schooled to being in a fifth grade class... tough enough without his learning issues... so well done...

Rebecca McNutt says

I'm not entirely sure what to make of *Superstar* both in the way it portrays autism so generally and also the unrealistic plot - Lester's father is an astronaut who died, which I kept telling myself was plausible enough to picture but it just didn't seem like it in the back of my mind. The book in and of itself is also written in a way that seems like it would appeal more to elementary school kids, not middle grade students in junior high. All that aside, *Superstar* does make some decent points about bullying and does a good job at portraying the rushed, extroverted atmosphere of a new school when you're an outsider who's been home-schooled your entire life.

I think what sort of bothered me about this book is the way Lester is described throughout. It's almost patronizing and seems like it could potentially confuse children who've been diagnosed with autism but don't necessarily fit all these broad symptoms mentioned about Lester. On top of that the way the bullying situation was handled by the adults present in Lester's life seemed a bit 'off'. I did like the story though, and for some kids I think they'd find it an engaging read.

Angela says

Once I had read the first third I was won over by this story and the portrayal of Lester, his persistence, his problem solving and love of space and science and his form of autism.

I didn't give it 5 stars as the situations and meltdowns seemed to get resolved too easily and the ending was too quick and too neat. However, the realism of the children in the grade 5 classroom is convincing; the tolerance by some kids of difference, the support they gave each other, balanced by the betrayal of friendship and the bullying

If you were reading 'Wonder' to year 6/7 students I'd say this is great for Year 5 and 6, and good for year 6 and intermediate age to read for themselves. There is a fair amount of humour to enjoy as well. From an adult point of view I liked how the mother was able to move from grieving and home schooling to having a job and more of her own choices in life - and letting Lester have some independence too.

Lynda says

Lester has been home schooled in the past, but now his mother is going to work and so he will be entering public school. That's when the adults discover (finally) that he is autistic.

I liked the story and the growing up that takes place by Lester, but I found his mother and teachers to be a little lacking in child psychology. His mother is a little more believable because Lester's father has died and she is still a wreck, but the teacher's should have had a little more awareness of Lester's issues.

Amanda says

It was refreshing to see a middle grades book written from the perspective of a 5th grade boy with high functioning autism. There were weak areas that were hard for me to overlook, but overall I think a book like this helps spread awareness. For full review, see here: <http://jungletigerteacher.blogspot.co...>

Kathleen says

Lester is not a stereotype of autism. He dislikes loud noises and always wants to abide by the rules, but he isn't a savant and is an excellent communicator. He makes friends and is capable of adapting, even if it takes him awhile.

Lester isn't the only character in the story who seems true to life. His teachers, principal, and mother are neither heroes or villains. The conversation his teacher has with the school secretary about adding another child to her roster (one who has been home schooled, no less) is completely accurate and heartbreaking, considering Lester hears the whole thing. It's possible that adult readers—specifically school staff members—might learn more from reading this book than middle grade readers, though I absolutely want to share this book with them too.

Tags:

Autism spectrum disorders

Misfits

Bullies

IEPs

Teachers

Fifth grade
Friendships
Single moms
Libraries
Librarians
Space
STEM
New kid

Sarah says

Superstar by Mandy Davis is a book about a kid named Lester Musselbaum whose dad had died in a spacecraft accident when he was young. His mom had no job and homeschooled Lester. They didn't have enough money to be financially stable, so his mom got a job and Lester had to go to a real school. Lester was going into fifth grade so everyone in his class already knew each other. On the first day of school a girl named Abby introduced herself and they soon became close friends. Most of the time in school Lester was happy, but Abby and Lester were both bullied. This book explains the struggles of Lester and takes you deep into his life and his adventures through fifth grade. Superstar shows that you don't have to be perfect and that teamwork helps you complete anything that gets in your way. You will love this book if you enjoyed wonder. They both talk about imperfections and friendships, and overcoming issues in their path of happiness
