



A Handful of Stars

Cynthia Lord

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When Lily's blind dog, Lucky, slips his collar and runs away across the wide-open blueberry barrens of eastern Maine, it's Salma Santiago who manages to catch him. Salma, the daughter of migrant workers, is in the small town with her family for the blueberry-picking season.

After their initial chance meeting, Salma and Lily bond over painting bee boxes for Lily's grandfather, and Salma's friendship transforms Lily's summer. But when Salma decides to run in the upcoming Blueberry Queen pageant, they'll have to face some tough truths about friendship and belonging. Should an outsider like Salma really participate in the pageant -- and possibly win?

Set amongst the blueberry barrens and by the sea, this is a gorgeous new novel by Newbery Honor author Cynthia Lord that tackles themes of prejudice and friendship, loss and love.

A Handful of Stars Details

Date : Published May 9th 2017 by Scholastic Press (first published May 26th 2015)

ISBN : 9780545700283

Author : Cynthia Lord

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Childrens, Middle Grade, Realistic Fiction, Animals, Dogs, Fiction



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From Reader Review A Handful of Stars for online ebook

jv poore says

Simply stated lessons about friendships, both fleeting and forming, blend beautifully with little lessons about tiny blue bees and Wabanaki blueberry legends.

A mature little girl, Lily (because “Tigerlily” is a weed, not a name) spends her summers helping in her grandparents’ general store....which is to say the only store in a blueberry-harvesting Maine town busy with migrant workers, locals and tourists from America and Canada. Painting bee houses at her very own table, Lily earns money for an operation that may help her cherished Lucky see again.

“People want us to come and work, but they want us to be invisible.”

The beloved bond built on the unconditional love between girl and dog is artfully illustrated in this book. It is a vibrant thread throughout pulling Lily to Salma, the young migrant worker who shares the affinity for dogs and the sorrow of loss. The girls aren’t exactly alike. Lily’s bee houses are carefully stenciled where Salma’s are impulsive and colorful.

“That’s what I like about art. It lets me become more like myself, not more like everyone else.”

Lily is engagingly open-minded and inclusive with a bit of a stubborn streak. Her growth, while not monumentally exponential, is enlightening and reassuring. Realizations are sluggish; but sweet and hopeful, like a slowly waking rose bud bursting open to brilliancy.

While this is clearly a compelling, captivating story for young readers, it should not be pigeon-holed as a “children’s” book. I honestly and truly believe that every single person deserves to experience the magic of an unapologetically honest, delightful friendship and the benefit of shifting perceptions.

“(Tigerlilies are weeds) only because somebody said so. Lilies are proud and sassy. They don’t know they’re weeds.”

This review was written for Buried Under Books by jv poore.

Sarah Levy says

What could be better than a story involving summer, dogs, a friendship and blueberries?! A Handful of Stars is a heartwarming story of an unlikely friendship and a summer to remember. I love Salma's character and wish I could learn a little more about her life and family! Perhaps a sequel, Cynthia Lord?

Carol Royce Owen says

There are certain authors that attract my attention every time they have something new come out. I don't even ask what it's about, I just order it, because I have that much faith that the book is going to be good. Such

was the case with Cynthia Lord's *A Handful of Stars*. After *Rules*, *Touch Blue* and *Half a Chance*, *The Shelter Pet Squad* and let's not forget *Hot Rod Hamster*, I knew I wasn't taking too great a risk, and I wasn't wrong.

I'll admit. I did question my decision when I first got the book and read what it was about. A girl, Lily trying to save Lucky, her dog's site meets a migrant worker girl named Salma, who wants to be in the local pageant. Ok, it's got to get better than that. And it did. It wasn't long before I was in love with each character, even the possibly ex-best friend, Hannah, the one you think is going to be the villain.

In the book, though, I learned a lot about blueberries, a lot about mason bees, which I had never heard of before, and a lot about the hardships faced by migrant workers, especially the children, when they move from state to state, following jobs and never able to stay in one place. Sensitive and sweet on all levels.

Lynn Plourde says

A HANDFUL OF REASONS TO LOVE A HANDFUL OF STARS

#5-This middle grade novel has the best cover. I dare you not to peek inside—that dog, the lone blueberry on his nose, oh my!

#4-Once inside, you'll find a fresh, intricately-woven story with themes of friendship, loss, living outside the box, being true to oneself, prejudice, poverty, independence, bravery. So much packed into this character-rich, well-plotted novel.

#3-MAINE! If you love Maine, you'll be immersed in an original Down East story set amongst the blueberry barrens, with migrant workers, a Mémère and Pépère, tourtière pie, a general store that carries everything you need and don't need, a summer festival, Robert McCloskey's *Blueberries for Sal*, good dogs, and good hearts.

#2-A perfect read-aloud for a family, for a classroom, for a summer camp—savor the words; become friends with Lily, Salma, and Lucky; chat about what speaks to you, what surprises you, what the story tells you about the past, the present, and the future.

#1 Cynthia Lord www.cynthialord.com (author of the Newbery Honor Book *Rules*) is never teachy-preachy. She doesn't hit you over the head; but rather, her story tiptoes from her writer's heart into your reader's heart, and you'll find yourself nodding and smiling and knowing as she uncovers "truths" that resonate beyond Maine's borders, beyond the pages of this book, and beyond the target age level for this novel. Bravo!

Brandy Painter says

This is a heartwarming story of friendship, family, and summer. I liked how it showed the changes that occur in friendships without having demonize a girl for liking feminine things and being into boys. I've been

encountering too many of those lately. It is also a short book so a good one to give to readers who are still turned off my longer novels.

Alice says

I don't think there's a Cynthia Lord book that I don't like. The layers to the story stick with the reader long after, like the memory of time well-spent with a good friend. *A Handful of Stars* is about friendship. First we have the friendship of a beloved animal companion, who has reached the age where he has special needs, but is still a beloved friend. Then there is the friendship that once had the friends two peas in a pod. But the pod has broadened, and the peas are less close, yet still connected, if only by wistfulness. And finally there's the courage to make new friends, try new things, and allow yourself to grow. This book is beautiful.

Crystal says

This is another book that I read (via audio) where I didn't pay enough attention and ask enough questions. A twitter friend Sujei, pointed out a few things that made me think. Salma (a friend of the main character) speaks Spanish and her family are migrant workers. She says she lives in Florida part of the year, but we never know the country her family came from. Why? She is super helpful to Lily but as Sujei pointed out, she works well as a prop for Lily but isn't a fully developed character.

When I casually listened to the story, I had a few qualms here and there, but ignored them and or didn't question too deeply. I wonder when I will get to that place when I read more carefully and don't just gloss over them. I appreciate those people who speak out about the problematic aspects of children's literature because I miss things more than I care to.

Joanna Marple says

Once again, a Cynthia Lord middle grade novel brings me to tears. A heart-warming story of friendship, differences, the power of imagination and courage. I love how Cindy combines a setting in her home state (which she knows well) with a community I know she had to research to get all the details just right. Among the blueberry rakers are migrant workers from all over the US (and Canada) and having the protagonist's new friend be a bilingual hispanic girl who is a raker, introduces readers to a community they probably know less about, and in a gentle way, some of the pre and misconceptions people may have about the migrant workers. I loved learning more about the blueberry harvest and Blueberry Queen pageant and the bees. And who wouldn't cheer for a story with the best sort of outcome for a blind dog?

Cindy lord has a way of capturing the best of tweens while not shying away from some less appealing moments of these years, when jealousy creeps in and friendships drift apart as focus changes. The conflict and concerns, kindness and resistance are all authentic and the characters are all very relatable for kids.

I already love Maine, but would love to visit the blueberry barrens in Downeast Maine and taste a blueberry enchilada.

A little NB from me to say that wherever you live and/or choose to set your story, there is always room to

paint in a little of the rich cultural diversity in almost every community now.

This is a beautiful read I would recommend to 3rd to 5th graders!

Mary Lee says

Change, friendship, dogs, Maine and blueberries. A wonderful story from beginning to (get your hanky ready) end. Schools in any community that hosts migrant farm workers should make this a must-read.

Beth says

[(and I found Hannah's winning - and the way it was barely touched by the narrator, as if it hurt too much, to be the most realistic part of the plot) (hide spoiler)]

Richie Partington says

Richie's Picks: A HANDFUL OF STARS by Cynthia Lord, Scholastic Press, May 2015, 192p., ISBN: 978-0-545-70027-6

“Seems like I’m not here, it’s like I don’t mean nothing
Like glass, I’m clear almost like you can see straight through me”
-- Jennifer Hudson, “Invisible”

“Do you have to live here to enter?” Salma asked.

Why’d she ask that? I tried to catch Salma’s eye, but she was looking at Hannah.

‘No, last year there was a girl from New Hampshire in the pageant,’ Hannah said. ‘It’s easy to enter. You just have to copy the form off the festival website and bring it to Mrs. LaRue at the Congregational Church. Then the night of the pageant, you wear a fancy dress, answer some questions onstage, and do a talent.’

‘Oh,’ Salma said. ‘I don’t have a fancy dress with me.’

Whew. That solves that. Salma was pretty enough to win a pageant. But the Downeast Blueberry Queen was usually blonde, like Hannah and Mama. And white. But I couldn’t say that. It would sound like we were prejudiced.

And maybe there was some of that? Or maybe the judges simply thought blondes were prettier. But either way, there was something shameful in saying that, and I didn’t want Salma to think I thought that way.

‘I’m getting a new dress for this year,’ Hannah said. ‘So I could loan you my dress from last year.’”

Twelve-year-old Lily is an orphan, living with her grandparents above their general store in Maine. Salma Santiago is the daughter of migrant workers, living in a camp near town while they’re employed for the blueberry picking season. Thanks to the antics of Lily’s blind dog, Lucky, who sniffs out and eats Salma’s lunch one day, Lily and Salma become friends. Lily’s particularly happy to have a new friend, since she’s lost much of the connection with her lifelong friend Hannah, who seems to be going boy-crazy.

When Salma learns from Hannah that the prize for becoming Downeast Blueberry Queen at the annual blueberry festival is a \$5,000 savings bond for college, and that Hannah can lend her a dress for the pageant,

she decides to enter the competition. Overcoming her initial hesitancy, Lily gets excited and hopeful for Salma. Meanwhile, the new friends also dream up a plan for raising money to get Lucky cataract surgery.

While things might not turn out for the girls exactly the way they envision, I like the way in which this coming-of-age story portrays young friends empathizing with and caring about one another. It also provides a portrait of hard-working migrant farm workers who, in many instances, can seem invisible to us.

YouTube makes a great companion for A HANDFUL OF STARS. I learned so much about blueberries and blueberry picking from reading the story. Then I watched a video of someone wielding a blueberry rake to harvest blueberries, and a video of a wild blueberry packing line in action.

We've been bringing home fresh blueberries from the weekly farmer's market, and now I can appreciate better what's gone into filling one of those plastic clamshell containers with fresh berries.

Richie Partington, MLIS

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Jan says

How could I not pick up a book with a cover that has a black lab balancing a blueberry on its nose? Well, I couldn't. Especially since it's the latest book by Cynthia Lord. For me, she's definitely one of those authors whose latest book I will always look forward to and want to read as soon as it comes out. I loved the first three books of hers that I read, Rules, Touch Blue, and Half a Chance, so I knew I would love this one also. I wasn't disappointed with this sweet story of love and friendship. Definitely a feel good book that warmed my heart and made me smile. Beautiful characters and a lovely story.

Holly says

Cynthia Lord is brilliant. How does she keep writing these beautiful, touching stories?! So much wisdom in this one about home, family, art, loss, love, moving forward, diversity, courage, letting go, friendship, identity - on and on. Some of my favorite pearls of wisdom:

"I think art can take ordinary things and show them to you like it's the first time you've ever seen them," she (Salma)continued. "And you realize that even ordinary things aren't really ordinary at all."

"That's something we can learn from dogs, isn't it? They don't keep looking backward at what they've lost or asking 'why me?' They just move on and find a new way to be happy again." (Pepere)

"Giving up and letting go are too very different things, Lily. Giving up is admitting you're beat and walking away. Letting go means you're setting something free. You're releasing something that's been keeping you stuck. That takes faith and more than a little courage." (Pepere)

Patti's Book Nook says

The bookseller I purchased this from said this was a wonderful middle grade book about big issues without being a "big issue" book. She couldn't be more correct. This cute and deceptively simple story features twelve year old Lily and her old dog Lucky, who live in Maine near a blueberry farm. One day Lucky gets away and crosses into the blueberry fields where a little girl Salma is working her plot. Salma catches Lucky by giving her a peanut butter sandwich. When Lily takes Salma's family a thank-you pie, the two strike up a lovely friendship.

Accepting change, evolving friendships, and the impact of art as a medium of expression are explored in this contemporary novel. The reader also glimpses loss through the lens of Salma, since her family never stays in one place. Lily's loss of her mom weighs heavily on her own day to day experiences. Together, the two teach each other about meaningful, lasting friendships. From a mutual love of painting to bonding over animals, this coming of age story set in Maine is sure to delight. And, of course, who can resist that cover?

Emily says

The last couple chapters are five-star worthy, but the rest of the book made it just a three star for me. Super disappointing because I actually cried at the end! I think this was just too short to have the impact that it had the potential to.
