



# Criss Cross

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She wished something would happen. Something good. To her. Looking at the bright, fuzzy picture in the magazine, she thought, Something like that. Checking her wish for loopholes, she found one. Hoping it wasn't too late, she thought the word soon.

## Criss Cross Details

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Author : Lynne Rae Perkins

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## From Reader Review *Criss Cross* for online ebook

### Jackie "the Librarian" says

I LOVED this book. YOU may *hate* it. This story is subtle as heck, and while it resonated with me down to my toes, it is a peculiar tale that some people will throw across the room and rage to the heavens "Why in the world did THIS win the Newbery Award?"

Funny, insightful, and wry. Yes, things DO happen, although not everyone will agree with me on that. I loved the start, where Hector, 14, experiences satori at a coffeehouse concert. And now, I know what satori means. Thank you, Lynne Perkins!

I laughed at the school yearbook haiku, I loved the diagram explaining perfect pant length, and I enjoyed the subtle humor and the playful text layout. For me, plenty happened -Debbie learning to use a stick-shift, Hector learning to play guitar (to meet girls, of course), and both learning more about who they are.

The only thing I wasn't crazy about was the cover.

Not for everyone, though. This is a very introspective book, and most boys will hate it! Give this one to your quiet, thoughtful girlfriends.

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### Lisa says

*Criss Cross* is a beautiful story of what it is really like to be a teenager.

It doesn't need the drama of violence or break-ups to show how fragile the world is when you are in a cocoon, waiting to be a butterfly and without a clue what your wings will look like.

It is full of small steps, some leading to new experiences and others just leading nowhere. The author's illustrations are a wonderful complement to the randomness of the story lines.

My favourite quote from the book sums up what makes it different from other teenage stories:

"So often in books, or in movies, one character looks at another character and understands in a precise way what that person is feeling. So often in real life, one person wants to be understood, but obscures her feelings with unrelated words and facial expressions, while the other person is trying to remember whether she did or didn't turn off the burner under the hard-boiled eggs."

That is the true *criss cross* of human interaction.

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### Kirsti says

"She wished something would happen. Something good. To her." keep wishing! This was just a random collection of memories, most of them not contributing towards the story in any way. Kirkus Reviews says 'A poignantly funny coming-of-age story'. Not only did I not find it funny, most of the characters barely changed and were just as childish at the start as at the end.

I picked this book up because of the interesting cover, and the reviews and blurb on the back. I was under the

impression something actually would happen in this book, but I was mistaken. It's one of those horrible books your year seven teacher is going to jam down your throat, and assume you'll like it aged anywhere from 12+, because it talks about guitars, rebellious clothing choices and secretly learning to drive. I hope in reality kids see it as drivel, and they probably will. The characters are meant to be around 14, and they come across as much younger. They mark holding hands as some momentous occasion!

Probably you're reading this view and not agreeing, since obviously this book is popular enough and has won a Newbery Medal, but I wonder how many 14 year olds, like the ones supposedly portrayed in the book, would agree with me?

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## **Christian says**

One of my little oddities is my inability to not finish a book. I know that many people don't understand this little obsession. A number of years ago, I took a children's lit class wherein we had to do a buttload of reading. I started reading *Ginger Pye* by Eleanor Estes because I thought it would be good to read all the Newbery books. But I utterly despised the book. My professor, baffled, asked me why I would finish reading such a horrendous book considering how many wonderful books there were out there. I told him that I just have to finish a book if I begin reading it.

Anyway, the moral of this little story should indicate how I feel about *Criss Cross*. *Criss Cross* won this year's Newbery award, and this year's Newbery committee won this year's WTF award. You could say it's a fair trade, though generations of kids will be cursed with this book on their recommended reading lists. I feel for them.

I should say that I had been biased going into this book—Pat Castelli discussed this book as part of her presentation at UVSC. Her handout summarizes the book as follows:

The "story" emerges in the 2006 Newbery Award in slice-of-life chapters from various points of view, thus it may be difficult to engage an average young reader. While 14-year-old Debbie is the main character, four of her friends are almost as important, three boys and a girl, Patty. The cover art shows a girl with her back turned and her fingers crossed behind her back with the statement, "She wished something would happen." Many young readers [and I might add older readers] may share her wish regarding the book. That said, there are charming scenes in this book and some that are absurd.

On one of the listservs I'm on, one reader came to the defense of the book by noting that

the Newbery is awarded to the book the committee deems the "most distinguished contribution to children's literature" in any given year. It is not given to "the book kids will love the most" or to "the most marketable book" or to "the most readable book" or even to "the \*best\* book."

Taking all of this into consideration, I still think the committee was smoking a whole lot o' pot when it chose this book. I'm all for literary and experimental writing, but you still have to give me a friggin' storyline to follow. Sheesh. And maybe I can forego an actual storyline if you give me a character to actually care about

through the little slices of life. This book didn't do that; by the end of the book, I couldn't even really tell you who any of the characters were. Another great gripe I have of this book is the author's complete inability to maintain point of view. POV shifts were haphazard and odd.

Really, in the end, this book very much should not have won the Newbery. Avoid it like the plague. Read Shannon Hale's *Princess Academy* instead.

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### **Wendy says**

I just loved this. It reminded me of the great fiction I read in *Sassy* magazine when I was a young teenager, before it went bust. I honestly didn't expect to like it, but it wasn't nearly as weird or quirky as I expected--I'd heard that parts of it were "told in verse", for instance, but there's just one short chapter of that and it isn't esoteric.

The setting made me think of what Laurie said about the *Penderwicks*--if you're going to write a book set in the forties, SET it in the forties. The world these characters live in does seem a little bit gentler and slower than the current one, and the seventies setting (understated, not intrusive) makes that make sense. But I thought, reading it, that when I was this age my world was also a little gentler and slower-moving than that of some of the other kids I knew--and I'm sure that will always be true for some teenagers--so in a way, the setting gives the book a way to be timeless, too. (That's a little garbled; sorry if it doesn't make any sense.)

I kind of wonder why it won the Newbery instead of the Printz. There's absolutely nothing that anyone could object to for younger kids (well, I guess some people object to a tobacco-chewing scene in which chewing tobacco is shown to be icky and dumb, but whatever), but I really don't think I would have gotten much out of this until I was at least thirteen. There's some overlap in the ages between the two awards, but I think this one skews older. (I'm sure I'm not the first to wonder about this.)

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### **Kathleen says**

I loved this book. It's funny and touching. It actually reminded me of what it was like to be 14. The tag line drew me in immediately: "She wished something would happen." I definitely remember spending my teen years wishing "something would happen." I still feel that way! The author writes so simply and perfectly. For example:

"Whatever her name was, she was pretty. She had a thick, careless braid of chestnut hair, a quick smile, and dark, merry eyes. She wore some kind of a fuzzy lavender pullover, and when she crossed her legs and lifted her guitar onto her lap, she had an interesting way of tucking the foot of the bottom leg back under her chair that made Hector feel melty. He looked away in self-preservation." (p.72).

That last sentence made me laugh out loud. So funny. A "careless braid". "Melty". Love it!

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### **Aj Sterkel says**

When I read the synopsis for this book, I had no idea what it was about. Now that I've read it, I understand why the summary is so vague. Nothing happens in the book. It's a quiet, meandering story about the

transition from childhood to the teenage years.

Compared to most middlegrade books, this one has a lot of characters. All of the characters live in the same neighborhood, and their paths keep crisscrossing. The novel mostly shows them going about their daily lives. Sometimes they notice each other, and sometimes they don't. All the young characters are becoming interested in romance and are starting to take on adult responsibilities.

“Life was rearranging itself; bulging in places, fraying in spots. Sometimes leaving holes big enough to see through, or even step through, to somewhere else.” – *Criss Cross*

**This book doesn't really have a plot.** It's set in a small town in the early 1970s. There are two main characters, Debbie and Hector. Debbie has agreed to help an elderly woman with her housework. Hector has started taking guitar lessons and is desperate to impress a girl in his class. Debbie and Hector are acquaintances who get together every week to listen to a radio show with their mutual friends. The reader knows that Hector and Debbie could be great friends (or even something more), but the characters are so caught up in their own lives that they don't pay attention to each other.

I'm not sure what to say about this book. I think **the story and characters are pretty forgettable.** It's a sweet, slow, realistic story about growing up. **The writing is where this book shines.** It's somewhat experimental and not the type of writing you'd normally find in a children's book. First, it's omniscient, so you're inside all the characters' heads at the same time. Also, there is a lot of unusual formatting. Some chapters are written in verse. One chapter is written in columns. There are mixed-media photograph/sketch things. The format makes the story feel very immediate. Each character is on his/her own trajectory, and there are many small events happening at the same time.

**I like how this novel addresses the idea of soulmates.** Maybe there isn't "one person for everyone." Maybe there are multiple people for everyone. In this book, the characters could have ended up in any combination of relationships and been happy.

“Debbie wondered if it was true that there was only one person in the world for every person, and if she had already met him, and she either had to find a way to be around him again someday or always be alone. Romance-wise. She didn't quite believe this. What seemed more likely was that there were at least five or six people scattered around the globe who you could bump into and, wham, it would be the right thing.” – *Criss Cross*

This story is about near misses. Sometimes we're so caught up in our own lives that we don't notice other people. Your future friend or lover may be standing next to you, but you have to look away from yourself to notice them.

“Their secrets inadvertently sidestepped each other, unaware, like blindfolded elephants crossing the tiny room.” – *Criss Cross*

**I'm not sure how I would have felt about this book if I'd read it as a kid.** I think I would've liked the formatting, but I was a profoundly stupid child. (You could ask my teachers. They'd agree.) **The subtlety of the story would have been lost on me. I probably would have been confused by all the characters.** There are a lot of them, and the minor characters aren't developed very well. I probably would have gotten them mixed up.

Ultimately, **this isn't one of my favorite Newbery winning books.** I think I would have gotten bored with it as a kid. It would have been too meandering for me.

**TL;DR: Beautifully written with thought-provoking themes, but otherwise forgettable.**

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### **Bethany says**

Well now I better understand the fuss about disappointing Newbery Medal winners. This book was boring, not memorable, and the characters did not interest me one bit. I don't know if perhaps it was the "listening" rather than actual "reading" that made it unenjoyable, but this story just didn't grab me in any way.

As I struggled through the 2 1/2 discs that I listened to, I was trying to figure out why it won the Newbery. Hmmm....

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### **Tripp says**

Wonderfully written, and a rare example of the omniscient mode in middle-grade/YA fiction, where first-person point of view has been king in recent years, it seems. The warm tone of the narrator follows a group of middle school kids, 14 years old, and some of the adults around them, as they go about their lives in a smallish town in a time before the Internet and cell phones. The narrator has a playful side, dipping briefly into the point of view of an inanimate object, such as a necklace, or animals, but two characters become slightly more prominent than the others: Debbie and Hector. The insights into the characters' lives, particularly those of the kids, proves the writer has not forgotten what it was like to be 14--in fact, she must have been taking excellent notes.

In my taxonomy of writers, there are storytellers and voice masters, the latter blessed with the ability to marry lovely, startling prose to interesting characters in offering amazing commentaries on life, while the former have a sure grasp of plot and are able to shape story arcs that seem inevitable and surprising at the same time.

Readers tend to prefer one to the other--we're all fortunate if we find the rare writer who combines both talents. I love a great story but I prefer those with a strong voice and beautiful prose; these are the books I reread, and *Criss Cross* falls into this category. Writers such as J. K. Rowling and, to a lesser extent, Suzanne

Collins, are consummate storytellers. I enjoyed both of their series, but neither contains a single memorable sentence; once I've read their stories I don't feel the need to revisit their books. I think most people prefer the storytellers, though, to judge by the bestseller lists, and that's fine, so long as the market still has room for those whose words are more than simply a vehicle to move characters and readers from one plot twist to the next.

Reread on May 6, 2012.

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## **Lars Guthrie says**

'Criss Cross' leads with its quintessential sentence: 'She wished something would happen.' Quintessential because the reader may often find himself wishing the same thing.

Perkins makes clever use of different styles of text and illustration in this novel about teen-age lives intersecting during a lazy summer in a small town. And the kids are interesting characters with depth. I was particularly fond of Hector, who actually does something (learns how to play the guitar). For the most part, however, nobody really does much of anything.

Well, the protagonist, Debbie, does get a boyfriend--for a few days.

Looking back on my adolescence, it all rings too true. Many hours of inactivity and wistful imagining are a major part of that period of life. But this reader wished for some elision.

Still, the book gets points for its dead-on portraits, especially its measured and funny put-down of the insensitive jock, Dan Persik. And for its graphics, language, and poetry.

Where Jane Purdy in Beverly Cleary's 'Fifteen' can barely imagine herself composing haikus 'if she could get them to come out in seventeen syllables,' the world-weary girls of 'Criss Cross' toss out one delightful haiku after another:

'The page is empty  
Who knows what mystery  
Will be written there?'

As you can see, though, nothing much happens in the haikus, either.

Something is happening with me. I'm steadily moving toward my goal of reading all the Newbery winners. With 'Criss Cross' (2006), I've got a major chunk, 1986 to the present, out of the way. 1967 to 1981 is done, too, and lots of smaller spans before that.

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## **Hallie says**

I wasn't even on Goodreads when I read this, and the five stars is just a guess, but I do know I loved it. Copying and pasting (and cutting) from two LJ write-ups below.



Okay, so probably most people have read *Criss Cross* by now - or at least, everyone in the States, as for some bizarre reason, it STILL hasn't been published this side of the Pond, which seems ridiculous. But there's not a huge amount to say about the plot of this book, anyway, aside from its being mostly about a - or maybe two - 14-year-old(s), in a small town in the sixties. The book opens with Debbie wishing that something good will happen to her soon, and there's a lovely, gentle movement through the book of what she sees happening and changing her and what she doesn't necessarily see. And Hector, the other main character, is dragged along by his older sister to a 'coffeehouse thing' at a nearby community college, where he's so impressed by a guitar player that he decides he has to learn to play himself. And the criss-crossing theme applies to them and other people, and them and each other, and they're all really nice people and the kids feel so very right and the humour is just my type. I have no real idea why this makes me think of food, but it does. A really light lemon pudding - not too sweet, and not at all stodgy!

[A few days later, I wrote more about it]

I remembered after posting the little I managed to say about *Criss Cross* that I'd completely forgotten to mention the *Midsummer Night's Dream* theme in it (though perhaps theme is too strong a word). I don't think I even saw the epigraph when I read the book, but noticed it when I was checking publisher (as I didn't want to grumble about the fact it had never been published This Side only to find it was). It's 'What thou seest when thou dost wake, Do it for thy true-love take...'

I really want to reread this book anyway, as I read it in interrupted doses and when pretty exhausted and stressed, but I've caught some of the AMND tracings and was retrospectively extremely impressed by how this was worked in. It's not at all a simple one-to-one pairing of any character, but rather the shifting *seeing* as these kids start to wake up to romantic possibilities in old and new friends. There's even a little touch of magic, as for example, when a necklace which has moved around the town through various different characters' hands fails to achieve anything when finally reunited with its owner. I loved this part. (I'll take out the characters' names, as it's fairly near the end. Not that there's any kind of spoiler really, but still.)

X did look at Y, and he saw her, really saw her for a moment. Y looked at X and she saw him, really saw him, for a moment. If it had been the same moment, something might have happened. But their moments were separated by about a second. Maybe only half a second. Their paths crossed, but they missed each other.

The hardworking necklace couldn't believe it. It let out an inaudible, exasperated gasp.

The more I think about what is rather broad comedy in the play when it concerns adults under enchantment, and how it becomes a perfect description of kids just coming into adolescence, the more I like this. I even wrote down who likes whom and who whom likes in return and the criss-crossing patterns of this through the book for myself! And okay, perhaps this isn't going to be as good an image of a 14-year-old now, growing up in a world stuffed with TV soaps and reality shows, but neither is it confined to adolescence in biological years. I've seen people even older than I am who are 'waking' and 'seeing' and 'loving' people in dizzyingly rapid succession.

It occurred to me early this morning that there's even a character who plays the role of the 'rude mechanical'. And it's glorious because he's anything BUT 'rude' or crude or stupid. This is Lenny, for those who've read the book, and I already thought he was yet another wonderful character. His 'metamorphosis from bookworm to gearhead' is seen to be likely to separate him from his friends - though it's not clear 'just how far apart the

paths would eventually veer'. And 'maybe it was some kind of tragedy that no one spotted who Lenny could be. Or maybe it wasn't. Lenny didn't need someone to tell him who he was.' How amazing to get so much of character, and so much awareness of social pressures and their effects (and sometimes the limits of their effects) in such a short and simple bit of writing.

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### **Jean says**

To some readers, "nothing happens" in this story. But to me there is a whole universe of wonder in that "nothing"! It was as real to me as my own junior high school days, as if Lynn Rae Perkins lived in my neighborhood, hung out with me and my friends and classmates, and could see into our dreams. I loved the illustrations; they seemed so genuine, with a home-grown, sometimes droll feel. Pieces of the text are like that too--unfettered expressions, as if created by an exploring young diarist.

I think this book especially speaks to poetic souls who remember the singularly clumsy, magical, transformative years of budding into being...and contemplating fate.

(I suspect teens might react differently than nostalgic women like me--but I hope they love it too!)

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### **Jackie says**

A book without much plot, but with beautiful writing and convincingly drawn characters. Set in what appears to be the 70's, Perkins tells the criss-crossing stories of a group of friends on the cusp of adolescence. Constantly shifting point of view between characters suddenly awkward as they consider the possibilities before them, and the selves they might become, Perkins focuses not on the life-changing moments, but on the small events when a piece of oneself comes into greater focus. This won't be a hugely popular Newbery winner, but will be appreciated by the quiet, thoughtful reader drawn to psychologically realistic character studies.

My favorite passage: "So often in books, or in movies, one character looks at another character and understands in a precise way what that person is feeling. So often in real life, one person wants to be understood, but obscures her feelings with completely unrelated words and facial expressions, while the other person is trying to remember whether she did or didn't turn off the burner under the hard-boiled eggs" (280-81). Perkins' narrative doesn't give in to the typical book/movie conventions; instead, it offers readers the comfort of knowing that mistakes will be made, opportunities will be missed, but "It was okay. They can't hear me, but I want to tell them it's okay, they're doing just fine" (337).

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### **Beth says**

This may be the most fascinating Newbery book I've ever read. It manages to be about nothing, and also everything, because it's a book about the ordinary moments most people don't think to write about. It's about ordinary characters who aren't special or different, who might live next door. And so it's quiet - and yet it's not really contemplative in its quietness, because it doesn't reach for much. It is content to chronicle an ordinary summer.

The prose can be beautiful, by the way. It's an achievement, to chronicle an ordinary summer and to breathe

real truth into it every so often.

*Criss Cross* isn't a great book, but it is an interesting one. Even though it comes very close to being boring.

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### **Melody says**

This book won the 2006 Newbery Medal, and I am for once in complete accord with the Newbery Committee. Perkins' prose is spare and clean. Some of the passages simply glow, especially when they are highlighting the ways in which we try to communicate and fail. Characters who love each other are at cross purposes with the best intentions in the world. The characters are sympathetic and believable, there are no emotional pyrotechnics, no huge tragedies these kids have to recover from, they are ordinary, singular, delightful young adults who learn some things worth knowing. Illustrated, which I confess put me off at first, but done so well I began to look forward to each intriguing illustration. I recommend this book without reservations.

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