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Crenshaw



Synopsis

In her first novel since *The One and Only Ivan*, winner of the Newbery Medal, Katherine Applegate delivers an unforgettable and magical story about family, friendship, and resilience. Jackson and his family have fallen on hard times. There's no more money for rent. And not much for food, either. His parents, his little sister, and their dog may have to live in their minivan. Again. Crenshaw is a cat. He's large, he's outspoken, and he's imaginary. He has come back into Jackson's life to help him. But is an imaginary friend enough to save this family from losing everything? Beloved author Katherine Applegate proves in unexpected ways that friends matter, whether real or imaginary. This title has Common Core connections.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (222 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,904 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Homelessness & Poverty](#) #52 in [Books > Children's Books > Activities, Crafts & Games > Activity Books](#) #98 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Friendship](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

Customer Reviews

This book does a phenomenal job of being engaging and fun despite material that could so-easily delve into dark and disturbing. The author walks that precise line of creating empathy without creating too much distress for young readers. I have no qualms letting my 10-year-old or even 8-year-old read this one. It *does* talk about homelessness and its side effects for a young child, but somehow the imaginary friend (who's introduced in the first line as a surfboarding cat who's holding an umbrella) makes things lighthearted and safe, even while you recognize that he's a sign of

emotional distress. FOR PARENTS - CONTAINS SPOILERS If your child is sensitive (like mine are), it may help to know that the imaginary friend is silly enough to break up the tension on a regular basis. Many of the most-difficult moments of the book happen in the past (from the previous time this boy had to live in the van with his family and their puppy for 14 weeks), so you know they eventually made it out. And although he mentions having seen his dad cry (the only time he had seen such a thing), most of the darker moments focus on things like the van being smelly, or how he didn't like his younger sister kicking him in her sleep (so he decorated a cardboard panel to put in between them). There's a lot of generosity/kindness from strangers, which helps a lot even though they *were* still living in a van, which keeps you empathizing with them but not spiraling into despair. There are also a couple of places where he says "I know other people have it much, much worse, but I still hate this," which again triggers empathy and understanding, without minimizing what anyone has to go through... making you aware of those darker stories, but not taking you into them.

Uncertainties frighten and anger Jackson. He prides himself on his scientist-like thinking, and that's what he wants to be when he grows up--a scientist. But, like most kids in a family with some serious problems, he has limited time to think about his future. His dad was once a successful construction worker who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and could only take part-time jobs after that time. His mother was once a middle-school music teacher, until her job was eliminated, and she then started working up to three part-time jobs at a time. Unfortunately, all that part-time work never seemed to add up to full-time wages, and, once again, Jackson's family was looking at the possibility of having to live in their van. Living in the van didn't seem that bad to Jackson the summer before he entered second grade, but he could not fathom doing so again the summer before he was starting fifth grade. That's when Crenshaw returned. Crenshaw was there the first time the family became homeless, and he was back the second time it looked like homelessness was approaching. Crenshaw was Jackson's imaginary friend, and he was one big cat. Like Jackson, he also wasn't particularly sentimental and liked to stick to facts. Unlike Jackson, who feared he was beginning to lose it, Crenshaw had no problem with the existence of an imaginary friend, even for a boy going into fifth grade. So this story goes . . . and it is an excellent example of a writer dealing with a major social issue without being too heavy-handed. For some, the story will seem magical. For others, it won't seem magical enough. For example, at times, Crenshaw seems more like a therapist explaining why imaginary friends exist, instead of seeming like an imaginary friend created by a young boy.

My oldest daughter and I absolutely loved *The One and Only Ivan*, so I was very excited about the opportunity to read Katherine Applegate's newest novel, *Crenshaw*. Jackson is a young boy who lives in an apartment with his parents and his sister. The family doesn't have a lot of money, and Jackson and his sister are often hungry. Jackson is a very intelligent boy, who loves animals and relies on facts. When he begins to see a giant cat named Crenshaw, he isn't sure what to think of this development. After all, it is a fact that imaginary friends are just that- imaginary. They aren't real. They can't be real. Or are they? As Jackson watches his parents gathering up most of their possessions to sell at a yard sale, the family's financial situation becomes more apparent. There is the possibility that they will have to leave their apartment and live in their van, something that happened several years ago. It was at this point in his life that Crenshaw appeared the first time. Has Crenshaw returned to help Jackson again? This was an incredibly poignant story. Jackson is an incredibly mature and insightful boy. He cares deeply about his family, especially his little sister, who he tries to protect from seeing how dire things are. Jackson loves his parents, but he is frustrated with the situation. He also struggles with the possibility of losing his home, his friends, and having to leave his school and go somewhere else. Applegate deftly weaves a story that shines a light on the reality of homelessness: the struggle for some families to keep up with the bills, and how suddenly families can lose everything.

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