



Finalist, Middle School Category



Essayist: Emilie, age 13, Maret School

Advocating for: *Eventown* by Corey Ann Haydu

If you go to your local or school library, hunt through the stacks to the middle grade fiction section, and crouch down at the HAYs, you'll find an average-looking, 287-page chapter book, with the word *Eventown* written in white font on the spine. I won't pretend that *Eventown*, written by Corey Ann Haydu in 2019, isn't popular or well-known. It's won multiple independent awards, and is acclaimed by other distinguished authors. *It has stuff going for it*. But this book also has special significance to me personally.

The book centers around a girl named Elodee, her twin sister Naomi, and her newly broken family as they move to a perfectly planned community and try to rebuild their life after the suicide of Elodee's older brother, Lawrence. Funny thing is, I probably couldn't even describe my first read to you. It was just one in a long line of mid-length chapter books that I devoured in the fourth grade. I read *Eventown* for a second time during quarantine in 2020, and this time, I saw parallels. Because of being inside and largely focused on hearth and home, my family and I connected in a way we really weren't able to in years before. Our family structures are nearly identical: watching my older sister and one of my favorite people in the world struggle with her own mental health has been a part of my life since I was little. And something that hit especially hard was the character of Naomi. My own twin died a few hours after birth, something that was horribly painful for my entire family, and left me growing up with a permanent sense of... *what if?* Finishing this book for the second time, the unthinkable happened: I started crying. For the first time, I was really truly grateful to my parents for telling me that story and not keeping me in the dark as "protection".



Haydu's "perfect" planned community fit almost seamlessly into my own idea of "perfection", fed by children's media and outside sources, that was reinforced for my entire childhood. The book deeply and sometimes almost creepily explores the stories that society will keep silent in order to push its idea of perfection: fertility issues, generational trauma, suicide, and many others. I think this book is valuable because it shows us that perfection can never be achieved by cutting away the bad things; that will only make us less whole. Instead, perfection is acknowledgement. Perfection is working through trauma healthily, at your own pace. Perfection is the support of friends, family, and community to help you work through it. In the end, I think even the book's name, *Eventown*, shows the fact that community is an essential part of this equation. Whether it's a friend group, family, a class, a club, this book encourages people to find that community, and support it as much as it supports you.