

Best Friends

Shannon Hale

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With the most popular girl in school being her best friend, Shannon can't help but think the beginning of sixth grade will turn out pretty well. But as time goes on, Shannon starts to realize a change in her friends and their interests, as all her friends seem to transition into the phase of growing out of their old games and jokes. Suddenly, with new things like pop culture and crushes, Shannon struggles with navigating the "rules" of being cool and maintaining her close group of friends. Despite feeling like an outcast, Shannon learns to grow and embrace her uniqueness as well as understand that friendships can sometimes be a little roller-coaster-y and that's okay.

This is a graphic novel for children around 7-13 years old. It's more of a children or middle school level book.

This is the second book that follows the *Real Friends* series by Shannon Hale. In the first book, *Real Friends*, Shannon Hale shares the beginning elementary school years of her life and struggles of making friends up to her 5th grade year. This book starts off where the first book left off and it follows Shannon as she grows as a sixth grader up to the start of junior high school, when she just barely starts seventh grade.

I like that this book had a similar charm to the first book. Shannon's personality and imaginative thinking continued to be genuine in the second book. Additionally, the artwork never failed to disappoint either. Something interesting that made this novel different from the first book, was the implementation of a side story going on, apart from the main story. As the book-character-Shannon goes through her life events, she also writes a fictional story in her free time, that makes several appearances here and there in between Shannon's daily life segments. As Shannon's own life complicates, her fictional story follows along and develops in similarly complicated and conflicting ways. Overall, the life that Shannon lives in her daily life seems to reflect and influence the story-writing process of her own fictional character, Alexandra, who deals with the same similar concepts of feeling outcasted and confused, which Shannon feels herself. I liked how the dual storylines were able to work together and strengthen the overall course of the story.

Compared to the last book, I feel like this one did not touch on some subjects or fields of life that the last book touched on. For example, *Real Friends* tied in Shannon's family and personal relationships with her siblings, which helped us better understand Shannon's life and conflicts. I was hoping that *Best Friends* would similarly try to give us a full rounded view of Shannon's life, especially the sphere of her family life, but most of these details were kept quite minimal this time. This book was mostly concerned with the smaller friendship conflicts that Shannon had in her immediate friend group, but even these characters didn't seem to change quite dramatically as the first book. I feel like the first book, displayed a more organic growth of Shannon in the way she carried herself and associated with other people. I didn't see as much of that internal growth this time, but maybe that was also because the time frame setting of this book was a lot shorter than the last one.

Despite this, however, I still think that the struggles and pressures that Shannon dealt with in *Best Friends* were quite relevant and relatable to what many young teenagers may feel

like. It was a new perspective of friendships that reflected Shannon's age of growing up and I think this may be something many students, especially those entering middle school, may appreciate.

Recommended Titles:

Real Friends by Shannon Hale

Sisters by Raina Telgemeier

The Babysitter's Club by Ann M. Martin

The Secret Language of Girls by Frances O'Roark Dowell

Switched at Birthday by Natalie Standiford