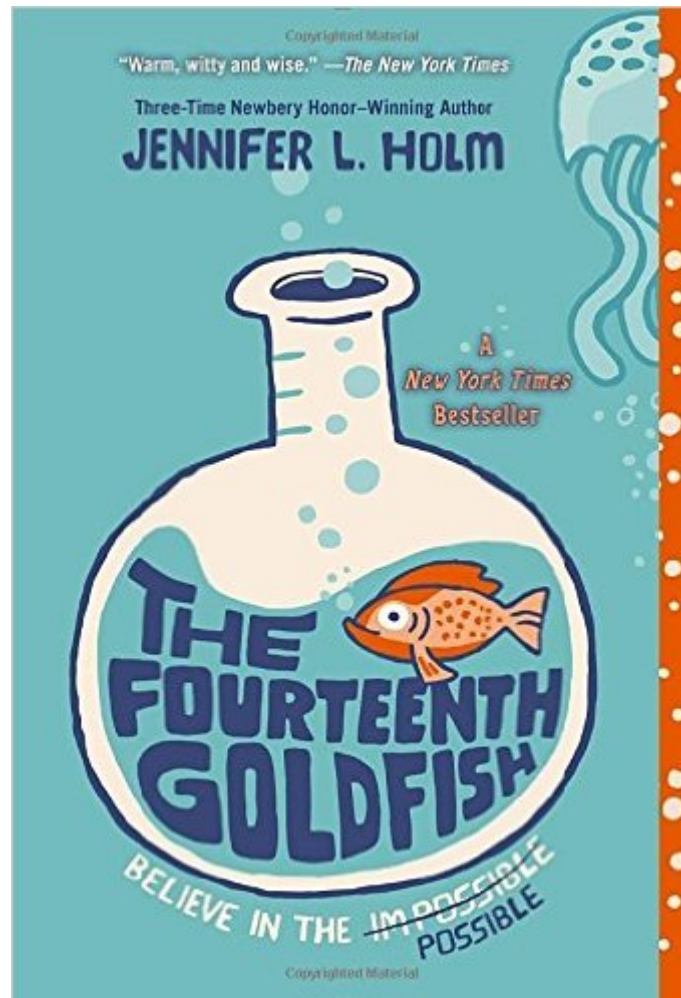


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The Fourteenth Goldfish



Synopsis

Believe in the possible . . . with this New York Times bestseller by three-time Newbery Honor winner Jennifer L. Holm. Galileo. Newton. Salk. Oppenheimer. Science can change the world . . . but can it go too far? Eleven-year-old Ellie has never liked change. She misses fifth grade. She misses her old best friend. She even misses her dearly departed goldfish. Then one day a strange boy shows up. He's bossy. He's cranky. And weirdly enough . . . he looks a lot like Ellie's grandfather, a scientist who's always been slightly obsessed with immortality. Could this gawky teenager really be Grandpa Melvin? Has he finally found the secret to eternal youth? With a lighthearted touch and plenty of humor, Jennifer Holm celebrates the wonder of science and explores fascinating questions about life and death, family and friendship, immortality . . . and possibility. Look for EXCLUSIVE NEW MATERIAL in the paperback including Ellie's gallery of scientists and other STEM-appropriate features. "Warm, witty, and wise." The New York Times "Written in a clean, crisp style, with lively dialogue and wit, this highly accessible novel will find a ready audience." Booklist, Starred "Top-notch middle-grade fiction." Publishers Weekly, Starred "Ellie's memorable journey into the world of science will inspire readers to explore the world around them and celebrate the possible." Shelf Awareness, Starred "Awesomely strange and startlingly true-to-life. It makes you wonder what's possible." Rebecca Stead, Newbery Medal "winning author of When You Reach Me" SUNSHINE STATE AWARD FINALIST!

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

First, let's talk about the cover. Let's face it, goldfish and test tubes just aren't all that attractive. Now that I've read the novel, I can appreciate the cover art, but it didn't draw me in. My anticipation of reading this was tempered by the title and cover. However, since the author's reputation precedes her, I was undeterred. I've never met a Jennifer L. Holm book I didn't love, and *The Fourteenth Goldfish* is no exception. Now, let's talk about the book! Ellie and Melvin are some of the most interesting people I've met in a while. Ellie's life is in flux. Sixth grade isn't going so well since her best friend is slowly becoming her ex-best friend. Things get even weirder one night when her mother comes home with a teenage boy who bears a strong resemblance to her grandfather, Melvin. Turns out he is her grandfather Melvin, a scientist who has devoted years of research to searching for the fountain of youth -- and, evidently, he's found it. Holm has a talent for characterization, and she's crafted some doozies with Ellie and Melvin. Melvin ranks high on my list of coolest grandfathers ever. Given that he's at once a cantankerous old man and a teenager who marches to his own drum, he occupies a place all his own. It's interesting how advanced age creates a non-conformist, individualist attitude that translates into a bizarrely funny yet totally awesome form of swagger. This can be seen in Melvin's fearless fashion sense. Throughout the course of the book, he wears anything from miniature versions of old-man polyester pants, Ellie's pink ponytail holder, and, when he has nothing clean, he even dips into his "mother's" closet. Ellie's a smart girl in a completely believable way.

There are a lot of books and movies that turn on the old adult-kid switcheroo. Many are entertaining, but lots of them are slow to develop, are padded out in order to reach book/feature film length, can't settle on a tone, or wander around in search of a coherent plot to complement the premise. None of that is a problem here. It may sound odd, but this book struck me as mainly character driven. Our heroine is a sharp, wry, engaging narrator. Grandfather is a wonderful melding of crotchety, obsessed and bemused. Supporting players have distinct personalities and are allowed room to shine, even in their cameos. The result is that instead of the author laboring mightily to move around the pieces of a cumbersome plot, we are treated to a shaggy dog story with a surplus of small insights, pithy observations, and wry insights; all of this in the company of an engaging cast of

characters. Despite the generally light treatment, we touch on family issues, school issues, peer and friendship issues and a number of other subjects of interest to the target readership. This is leavened by generous doses of humor and the interesting premise. As if that weren't enough, the author makes a sincere and generally successful effort to make the story, ("...a cure for aging"), seem plausible in a way that will engage the scientific curiosity of a young reader. None of the story turns on magic or curses or other such easy MacGuffins. Rather, we are treated to bits and pieces of science fact and history that add another level of interest to an already interesting story. It helps that the book takes off like a rocket. There is no coy teasing about who that teen stranger is. It's grandfather; now let's get on with story.

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