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# 13: Thirteen Stories That Capture The Agony And Ecstasy Of Being Thirteen



## Synopsis

"If thirteen is supposed to be an unlucky number...you would think a civilized society could come up with a way for us to skip it." -- from "What's the Worst That Could Happen?" by Bruce Coville No one will want to skip any of the twelve short stories and one poem that make up this collection by some of the most celebrated contemporary writers of teen fiction. The big bar mitzvah that goes suddenly, wildly, hilariously out of control. A first kiss -- and a realization about one's sexual orientation. A crush on a girl that ends up putting the boy who likes her in the hospital. A pair of sneakers a kid has to have. By turns funny and sad, wrenching and poignant, the moments large and small described in these stories capture perfectly the agony and ecstasy of being thirteen.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

This is a fine collection of stories that most 13 year olds would find enjoyable. All are contemporary realistic fiction, save the last (see below), and there is one poem. The first story, Bruce Coville's "What's the Worst that Could Happen" is very funny and worth the purchase price alone. That the protagonists are all teens fits the reading proclivities of many adolescents. There are several stories that deal with teen romance/crushes, but always in appropriate and respectful ways, and there is usually some other theme going on (friendship can be difficult, family isn't always what you want,

etc.) A couple of the pieces have Gay-positive elements. The final story, Ann M. Martin and Laura Goodwin's "Tina the Teen Fairy" would be an excellent read-aloud for the first week of middle school, as it follows a fairy who must convince a girl that turning 13 is important. As a 7/8 grade teacher, I've already used a few of these pieces in class.

Author Sandra Cisneros expressed in her story "Eleven" that when you are eleven years old, you are also ten, nine and eight, and so forth. Thirteen is no different. When you're thirteen, you're also twelve, eleven and ten, yet you're expected --- and even want --- to be fourteen, fifteen and sixteen. Being thirteen is a time of confusion and sometimes anger, but it's also a time of hope and wonder, and a chance to start exploring who you are and what you want to become. Twelve authors and one poet, including teen fiction luminaries like Ron Koertge and Ellen Wittlinger, share thirteen stories that range from humorous to heartbreaking, all about the joy --- or the lack thereof --- of being thirteen years old. In Ann Martin and Laura Godwin's "Tina the Teen Fairy," a fairy visits Maia, who wants nothing more in life than not to turn thirteen, on the evening before her birthday. James Howe explores what a bar mitzvah means to one boy in "Jeremy Goldblatt is So Not Moses." As these authors show, it doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor, male or female, urban or rural --- there are some things about being thirteen that no one can escape. 13 is not a survival guide to anyone's thirteenth year; rather, it is a compilation of thoughts, memories and feelings that each author contributes to the reader. Instead of trying to guide the reader, these stories serve as sympathy and example. It is a collection anyone can enjoy, whether he/she is 13, 23 or 53. --- Reviewed by Carlie Kraft Webber

This is a fairly good collection of short stories. Good short story collections for teens are difficult to find (I'm a HS English teacher), and I definitely used this in the classroom. A few drawbacks, though. First of all, the cover is a bit misleading, as it shows a male teen on the cover, but in fact very few of the stories feature male protagonists. So yes, there are more female writers writing about teen girls in this book, but disappointingly, even the stories written by male authors feature female protagonists! Given that teen boys tend to be the reluctant readers, this imbalance does not help. Even more frustrating, one of the few stories that does have a male protagonist is chiefly about that protagonist's struggles with perhaps being gay.

My son is in 8th grade and never a big reader (which I am trying to change). This book appealed to him on two levels. First, the short story format was less "stressful" than having to commit to a full

length book. Second, the variety of stories has something for everyone. Some stories he identified with personally and others he felt helped him understand someone his age with a different background. There was also a mix of humor and seriousness that he really enjoyed. We both recommend this book heartily.

"13: Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen" is an engrossing, and often quite accurate, collection of short stories centering on different thirteen-year-olds. Although some stories focus less on actually being thirteen than they do on simply revolving around a 13-year-old character, it doesn't matter - it's still a wholly entertaining read. A few stories of note: "What's The Worst That Could Happen" by Bruce Coville - a funny but mostly painful tale of embarrassment that is bound to make the reader squirm at least once or twice. "Squid Girl" by Todd Strasser - a fascinating (and very funny) story about a girl who meets a boy while on vacation, told from an idiosyncratic second-person point of view. "Noodle Soup for Nincompoops" by Ellen Wittlinger - the story of a shy sideline-sitter who is able to express herself for the first time in the kooky guise of an anonymous advice columnist for her school paper. Other popular authors whose pieces are included in this compendium include Meg Cabot ("The Princess Diaries," "All-American Girl," etc.), Ann M. Martin ("The Baby-Sitters Club" series, etc.), and James Howe ("Bunnicula," etc.) who also served as editor for this collection. I personally think this book will be enjoyed by readers of all ages - those who have already been thirteen, those who are not thirteen yet, and those who are thirteen right now.

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