

Ruthless By Carolyn Lee Adams

Book Talk by Alexa Aguilar

Author Information



Carolyn Lee Adams was born in Washington and grew up in the Seattle area. She graduated from a film school with a degree in screenwriting. She enjoys writing about serial killers and exploring the darker side of human nature. *Ruthless* is her first published novel.

She does not have her own official website, she is instead on her publisher's website:

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Carolyn-Lee-Adams/452134690>

Summary

Ruth Carver is a seventeen-year old equestrian sports champion who has found herself in the direst of situations when she is abducted from her family's ranch. She is the seventh girl taken and next in line to die. Her only hope of survival is the Blue Ridge Mountains, where she is alone and relentlessly pursued by a vengeful malicious kidnapper. Every passing second stacks the odds against Ruth. Her intelligence and sanity are tested. However, refusing to become one more victim she is determined to win this game of survival between herself and her abductor, after all "winners are ruthless".

Significant quotes

“See! It does say he wets the bed!...For hours and hours his brain stays beautifully popped into place” (35).

Jerry T. Balls is the main antagonist of *Ruthless* and throughout the novel Adams gives glimpses of both Ruth's and Jerry's past. These passages help illustrate the present motivations and mentality of both characters, they act as foils between Ruth and Jerry. In these two particular paragraphs allude that this is the moment that Jerry's character begins his descent down the path of sexual assault, kidnapping and murder. Adams is humanizing Jerry by demonstrating the abuse he endures until he can no longer bear it when he realizes some startling facts about himself. This helps Adams bring attention to the topics of bullying, abuse, violence against women and raises the question of when is violence the answer. For a young adult audience such topics will always be topical in the contemporary time.

“Yes, really. Winners are Ruthless, Ruth...Huh, she says, letting the unexpected words seep into her bones” (69).

This passage is short, but packs a lot of meaning. This is a part of Ruth's Equestrian competition past and it reflects her present outlook on life. It also encompasses the entire base of the novel in that Ruth must be ruthless to survive. Adams is very good in using the character's past to bring attention to several topics. You have Ruth who as a child is learning to form a strong, independent personality and when she is older it explains why she is seen as callous. Ruth characterization draws attention to strong female leads, sexism, and how women should be allowed to unapologetically live their lives. Ruth is disliked and punished for her current mentality, and Adams makes it clear that this isn't a good enough reason that women in general should be.

“She thought she knew what it was to be a winner. It has a new definition now. It is and great and terrible thing, to know just what one can do. From now on she will live with the knowledge of what she can accomplish and the oppressive weight of expectation” (164).

This quote highlights Ruth's mentality throughout the entire novel, she regards the struggle to survive and overcome Jerry as a competition. It is a battle between two similar individuals who must use their knowledge and every advantage afforded them by their life experiences to stop one or the other. It also calls back to the struggle of morality and sanity Ruth faces, making several decisions that are cold-blooded and sometimes vengeful in an effort to survive. In this quote Adams shifts attention to the question of morality and the capability of humans, how far do people go to survive, to win. How does that change a person? It is a complex question with no definite answer, an answer that Ruth during the novel comes to believe is both great and terrible.

Resources

Where *Ruthless* falls into a category from *Literature for Today's Young Adults* is a mix between the Problem novel and Fantasy elements found in chapters 4 and 7. Many of the Problem Novel qualities are present in *Ruthless*. The novel has a strong and believable plot that plainly reveals Ruth's thoughts and feelings throughout her journey of survival. There are both negative and positive qualities in Ruth characterization. Adams shows Ruth is a strong and independent character capable of looking after herself. Ruth is a part of higher society in comparison to other characters, she isn't highly likeable, and is part of a different lifestyle that is entwined with her identity and one of the motivating factors in why she is abducted. However, Ruth reflects on herself and her situation so much that by the end of the novel she evolves into a better version of herself. The setting is also described incredibly well as it is a huge part of the story, sometimes acting as more than a background, but part of Ruth's troubles and tribulations and salvation. Furthermore, by the end of the book the topics that Adams implies throughout Ruth's story leaves lingering impressions and questions for teens to think about after the novel is done. As for fantasy elements, there is really only one. There are a few instances in the novel that Ruth speaks to and is guided by the ghosts or hallucinations of previous victims. She herself doesn't know if they are real or imagined, and the ghosts themselves are a comforting presence rather than a horror device, but nonetheless the macabre and fantastical element is there.

In *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story* chapters four and seven is where this book fits in. Chapter four is where books about real-life experiences are discussed and *Ruthless* in all honesty could be written about any girl or victim of a kidnapping. There are so many stories in the media across all mediums that concern young and old people alike who are stolen from their lives and fight for their survival. This isn't a purely fictional situation. It isn't hard to recognize that most mystery, suspense thrillers are grounded in true crime. This book also falls into chapter seven books about survival and courage. Ruth fights for her survival from the beginning of the book and continues to attempt to overcome every trial thrown at her, sometimes she fails and others she triumphs. She quite literally for a great portion of the novel has nothing at her disposal except for her wits, her courage, and whatever she can find to overcome the serial killer hunting her down.

So, why should we give this book to teens? Ruth presents a resourceful protagonist that still has the courage to hope in dire circumstances to teen readers. The topics brought up in *Ruthless* like feminism and mental health are a good way to get teens thinking about similar issues in contemporary society. Also people in general, especially teenagers are fascinated by true crime stories and *Ruthless* reflects the human experience by stepping into two perspectives of both the victim and victimizer to explore the hows and whys of crime, but also closer examines how morality ties in with survival.

Text Complexity

Exeter Quality 1: During *Ruthless* at almost regular intervals Adams shifts perspectives between Ruth and Jerry to build a foil between the protagonist and antagonist.

Exeter Quality 2: The tension remains high through most of the book as Ruth is almost at all times backed into a corner and yet the story reads fairly quickly.

Exeter Quality 3: The novel reflects the experience of an abducted teenager who remains a strong, independent female lead throughout the story.

Exeter Quality 6: Adams uses Ruth's and Jerry's narratives to bring up an array of important topics and themes that relate to contemporary concerns such as morality, feminism, sexual violence, abuse, and mental health.

The New Dale-Chall Readability Index: 5.2

Grade level of 5 - 6

ATOS Book Level score: 4.5

Interest Level in Upper Grades of 9-12

I agree with both the New Dale-Chall readability score and ATOS Book Level to some degrees. *Ruthless* though descriptive at times is quite simple and easy to read that most older children could follow along. The dialogue consists mostly of Ruth and Jerry's perspectives and is an easy enough read even though the subject matter is heavy. Due to the graphic nature of the book and the numerous depictions present of sexual assault, blood and violence, a large amount of implied and attempted murder the ATOS Book level is correct in that young adults in the upper grade levels should be the recommended audience for this book. To be transparent this novel should come with a trigger warning and for younger teens perhaps an older adult's permission or supervision might be needed.