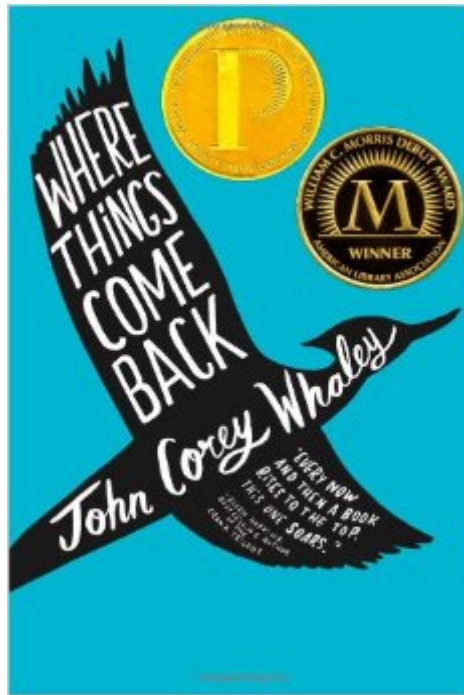


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Where Things Come Back



Synopsis

Winner of the 2012 Michael L. Printz and William C. Morris Awards, this poignant and hilarious story of loss and redemption explores the process of grief, second chances, and even the meaning of life (Kirkus Reviews). In the remarkable, bizarre, and heart-wrenching summer before Cullen Witter's senior year of high school, he is forced to examine everything he thinks he understands about his small and painfully dull Arkansas town. His cousin overdoses; his town becomes absurdly obsessed with the alleged reappearance of an extinct woodpecker; and most troubling of all, his sensitive, gifted fifteen-year-old brother, Gabriel, suddenly and inexplicably disappears. Meanwhile, the crisis of faith spawned by a young missionary's disillusion in Africa prompts a frantic search for meaning that has far-reaching consequences. As distant as the two stories initially seem, they are woven together through masterful plotting and merge in a surprising and harrowing climax. This extraordinary tale from a rare literary voice finds wonder in the ordinary and illuminates the hope of second chances.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A few years ago, I lamented to a coworker that great Southern storytelling - the kind that held you to the feet of your grandfather, hanging on his every melodious word as he took you to a place that was distant yet familiar; heart-wrenching but hilarious - was dead. It was a lost art of a past generation. I was wrong. John Corey Whaley proved me wrong and I'm grateful. *Where Things Come Back* immerses you into the quirky world of the small Southern town. Like many small towns, it's a place where everyone knows everyone else....on the surface...but rarely get to know the underlying

fears, motivations and anxieties of the people they interact with everyday. It's a place where the unique lifelong bond of brothers is made stronger by sharing not only blood, but an intellectual curiosity that is outside the norm. It's a place where close friends are often the only salvation from chronic, terminal boredom. I had such a great time reading this book that I bought an extra copy - one to keep for myself and one to pass along and share with family and friends.

You know you're reading a fantastic book when you read the last paragraph and immediately turn back to the beginning to start it over again. *Where Things Come Back* is just such a book. Personally I don't know just what it was that made this as irresistible read as it was. I don't know if I should praise the realistically flawed yet endearing characters. The fascinating mystery/introspective nature of the story. Or just the general captivating nature of the writing itself. What I can say is that *Where Things Come Back* is a must read book for everyone, both teens and adults. And that if you had to only read one book this month (I say month because there are some other fantastic books that came out this year and I'd hate to limit you), then it should be *Where Things Come Back*.

Where Things Come Back by John Corey Whaley is the kind of book that both mystifies and grows on you. It's an odd little story that I'm not completely comfortable with, but yet there were moments I was completely captivated and caught up in the ridiculous yet mundane goings-on of Lily, Arkansas. Cullen is just like most seventeen-year old boys in small towns. He's bored out of his mind, he hopes he'll have a more exciting future ahead of him, but while he's stuck there, he's going to make the best of it. Then, celebrity lands in Lily in the form of the long-thought extinct Lazarus woodpecker. Cullen is indifferent to the supposed woodpecker but that indifference turns to anger when his younger brother, Gabriel, goes missing and his name does not make the headlines. Gabriel Witter's disappearance is buried under the infatuation with the woodpecker. I couldn't help thinking what sly insight the author has into our society as a whole. When something garners its fifteen minutes of fame, in this case, the woodpecker, other more important matters go unnoticed. A fifteen-year old boy goes missing for over eight weeks and there is definitely not the search and rescue parties one often sees in cases like this. The local law enforcement was not helpful and Cullen continues to grow disenchanted with his hometown. Intertwined with Cullen's story is that of a boy named Benton and his college roommate, Cabot. I honestly found their story more interesting through the first half of the book, until Cabot went religious crazy which always rubs me the wrong way. However, how the author makes these storylines work together is inventive and brilliant. And, the author does a great job, writing wise, of making Cabot seem crazy (at least I thought so). One of

my favorite lines in the entire story was on page 166 which reads "He had taken Benton's notes and not blown them out of proportion so much as he had strapped an atom bomb to every letter of every word." It's this kind of larger than life writing style that makes these characters come to life. This book is different. It doesn't have a love triangle, it has a strong male friendship, it has two siblings and a family who patently care about each other but yet, there is dysfunction of sorts within all these relationships. How that plays out on the page keeps you reading. The fact that this book is very different, yet very normal (teen stuck in a small town, girl troubles, envy at the popular guy who has the girl he wants, etc) will resonate with teens. There is scorn, there is heartache, and there is family. On first looking at the book, it doesn't look as impressive as it appears to be, but there is definitely something special about this story. On the other hand, I think there are spots where this book suffers from lack of movement. The story gets bogged down in descriptions of actions, rather than dialogue and actual action so that, at least for me, led to me skimming several passages throughout this story (pages 184-187 in particular seem to suffer from this problem). The long paragraphs of text do not make for necessarily easy or even pleasant reading. On the other hand, Cullen is really just a normal teen boy and I like that about him. Nothing flashy, no extraordinary talents, at least outright visible like athletics or something. He's just a guy who cares about his brother, has a crush on an unattainable girl, and is not impressed with the Lazarus woodpecker. Reading about the utterly normal has a power all of its own and I think John Corey Whaley showcases that very well.

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