

Novel Resource for
A Crooked Kind of Perfect

By Linda Urban

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About the Author

Linda Urban was born in Detroit, Michigan. Her house looked the same as all the others. She says this sameness made her feel normal, when she worried that she wasn't. But she says she also wanted to shine and be noticed. Linda tried several things—ballet, singing—but found that she was good at writing. And she says it's fun! Linda's character Zoe certainly seems to be based on her childhood feelings.

Linda continued to write all through her schooling but continued to have doubts about her ability. So she directed her creative energies toward advertising and marketing. While working at a bookstore, she organized author events. She learned that all writers have doubts. Linda continued to learn about the craft and finally started writing again at age 37 when her daughter was two years old.

Linda Urban www.lindaurbanbooks.com

Publisher's webpage:

www.harcourtbooks.com or www.hmhbooks.com

Publisher's webpage for the author or author's books:

A Crooked Kind of Perfect

<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/titledetail.cfm?titleNumber=1198039>

Mouse Was Mad:

<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/titledetail.cfm?titleNumber=1098982>

Other Web Resources:

Linda Urban's blog: <http://lurban.livejournal.com/>

Lori Gordon loriagordon@sbcglobal.net

Annotation

Linda Urban always loved to write but A Crooked Kind of Perfect is her first published novel. This book about a 10 year old not feeling like she quite fits in is a reflection of Linda's own childhood. She goes on to say that there is no perfect book but I feel that many readers will relate to her story and claim it is perfect.

Zoe Elias is a 10 (almost 11) year old girl with big dreams. She wants to be a piano prodigy. She dreams of playing at Carnegie Hall. However, life takes a turn and her dad buys her an organ. The Perfectone D-60 to be exact. Zoe feels that life is not treating her fairly. Her mom works all the time, her dad has difficulty dealing with the world outside their house and her best friend has a new best friend. Zoe adapts to the changes of her world. She throws herself into learning the organ, even though she only gets to play *Hits from the 70's* and not real music. Wheeler, the school bully, starts following her home. When she is asked to play at the Perform-O-Rama, an organ competition, she doesn't believe she can go since her mom has to work. Her dad works through his fears and takes her, where she places fourth. Throughout the story, Zoe learns about friends and family and what she really wants out of life.

This novel is written for grades 4 and up. Although the main character is a girl, boys will be able to relate to Zoe and how she views her life. Linda Urban does a wonderful job of developing Zoe character. She also makes her family and Wheeler real. I think the style of writing will appeal to students because the chapters are short and humorous. The first chapter is entitled "How It Was Supposed to Be" and the second is "How It Is" and only three lines long. At one point in the story Zoe talks about how she wanted to be a Fireside Scout, who happen to be selling cookies at school. Because of her dad's fears of leaving the house, she was unable. The chapter is entitled "I Don't Need No Stinking Badges".

Genre

Realistic Fiction

Point of View

First Person

Theme

The major themes of the novel are family, friends, music and overcoming adversity.

Conflict

Zoe wants a piano more than anything. She visualizes herself at Carnegie Hall. However, it's not to be. Her dad buys her an organ instead. This is just the newest disappointment in her life.

Resolution

Zoe accepts the organ and her life the way it is. She finds that there are many ways to fulfill her dreams. In the end, her family surprises her.

Characters

Zoe Elias—10 (almost 11), wants to be a piano prodigy and play at Carnegie Hall

Mom—Zoe's mom, a very responsible adult

Dad—Zoe's dad, jittery, anxious, has difficulty dealing with the world outside his house

Mabelline Person—Zoe's organ teacher, loves ginger ale, especially Vernors in a glass with ice

Wheeler Diggs—Zoe's classmate, a bully, wears orange sneakers and a faded jean jacket even indoors, usually a mess except for his hair, Zoe thinks he has good hair

Hugh—UPS driver, delivers packages to Zoe's house, the only adult Dad speaks to except for Mom, he has big teeth and a bushy mustache

Emma Dent—Zoe's best friend, maybe

Colton Shell—lunch table companion, has a crush on Zoe

Henry and Danny—lunch table companions

Judy and Mona—Mom and daughter at the Perform-O-Rama who help Zoe, very friendly, Mona's a very good organ student

Setting

Zoe's house, school and the Perform-O-Rama in Michigan.

Interest Level and Reading Level

Interest Level is ages 8-12. Reading level is 3.9.

www.perma-bound.com

Lori Gordon loriagordon@sbcglobal.net

Booktalk

A Crooked Kind of Perfect by Linda Urban is a story about a girl named Zoe. She knows what she wants from life. She knows where she is meant to go. Sometimes life takes us on a crooked path to where we are meant to be.

Zoe Elias is meant for big things. She is meant to play the piano at Carnegie Hall. She is meant to wear long, beautiful gowns and tiaras. She is meant to have thousands clapping at her feet while she curtsies.

Instead, she has been given a clunky organ, not a graceful piano. And instead of Beethoven she has to play *Hits from the 70's*. Her mom is too busy at work. Her dad, well, he's different. Now her best friend has a new best friend. She's stuck eating lunch with a bunch of boys who have burping contests. (Did you know you can't burp upside down?) Then, the school bully, Wheeler starts following her home. Instead of Carnegie hall, she gets to perform at the Perform-O-Rama organ competition.

Sometimes life is what we expected. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes the unexpected is better. Join Zoe on a crooked path to finding out what she really wants.

Language

Prodigy (5)—a child with extraordinary talent

Fiscal responsibility (7)—careful with money

Accordion (11)-a portable wind instrument having a large bellows for forcing air through small metal reeds, a keyboard for the right hand, and buttons for sounding single bass notes or chords for the left hand

Conservative (14)-traditional in style or manner

Boardroom (25)—a room set aside for meetings at a company

Philosophy (11)—a system of principles for guidance

Hovering (40)—to keep lingering around

Candelabras (64)—a decorated, branched candleholder

Percussion (82)—the striking of a musical instrument to produce tones

Firkin (87)--a British unit of capacity usually equal to a quarter of a barrel

Competition (91)—a contest for some prize or honor

Sacrifices (92)—to give something up

Debating (96)—a first public appearance

Éclairs (99)—a finger shaped cream puff

Smitten (103)—having a crush on someone

Tempo (146)—musical beat

Lyrics (166)—the words of a song

Allegro (174)—a brisk tempo

Marzipan (203)--a confection made of almonds reduced to a paste with sugar and often molded into various forms, usually diminutive fruits and vegetables

Reconcile (210)—in banking, for statements to be equal

www.dictionary.com

Indiana Academic Standards met by content

Language Arts 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 6.3

Fine Arts—Music 3.9.2, 4.9.4, 5.8.4, 6.8.3, 6.8.4

Anticipation Statements

A Crooked Kind of Perfect by Linda Urban

Before		Anticipation Guide	After	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		It's ok if your family is different from others.		
		It's ok to be mad if you don't get what you want.		
		Everyone should have the most popular clothes.		
		It's cool to be in an organ competition.		
		You can love your parents even if they disappoint you.		
		Piano music is better than organ music.		

Read-Alouds

Read Aloud #1: p. 1-3

Prereading: “Today I’m going to introduce you to Zoe Ellias from A Crooked Kind of Perfect by Linda Urban. She’s a girl that has big dreams. Have any of you every really wanted to be or do something?””Well, Zoe does, she wants to play the piano. I’m going to read a few pages so you can get an idea of how important this is to her.

Postreading: Zoe has a definite picture of what it would be like to play the piano. Have you ever felt this way about something? What did you envision? Have you ever wanted to do something so much only to find out that you couldn’t? How did you feel? What did you do because of it? Do you think she should let her dream go? What kind of person do you think Zoe is? Does she seem like someone you would want to meet?

Purpose for choosing: I found these first two chapters to be a great introduction to Zoe. Although you never get a good physical description of her in the story, these chapters show her imagination and humor. She’s a character that you enjoy from the first page.

Read Aloud #2: p. 14-15

Prereading: “What words would you use to describe your dad? What kind of Dad do you think he is? Would you want to change anything about him? (jot down their answers to use in comparing Zoe’s dad) Today I’m going to read a few pages to you that will introduce Zoe’s dad. When I’m finished reading, I want to discuss how he compares to your ideas on what a Dad is like.”

Postreading: “Well, Zoe’s dad isn’t your typical dad. What is your first impression of him? What words would you use to describe him? Do you think any of the earlier descriptions fit Zoe’s dad? What did you learn about Zoe’s mom? (reread the paragraph that mentions her) Is she like your mom? What kind of family do they seem to be?”

Purpose for choosing: This selection gives a quick introduction to the issues that Zoe’s dad faces on a daily basis. You also get a quick peek at her mom and how analytical she is. Linda Urban does an excellent job of painting a picture with very few words.

Read Aloud #3: p. 69-70

Prereading: “When we read from A Crooked Kind of Perfect earlier, we learned about Zoe and her parents. We discussed their unique qualities, the things that made them interesting. Today’s

reading is going to show that Zoe is like most 10 year olds. Have you ever gone into the cafeteria and had no one to sit with? What if one day all seating was rearranged and you had to sit with a brand new group of kids, a group that you didn't fit with? Would you find this hard? Would you be ok with it? What might you do to be more comfortable? Zoe wants to fit in. However, sometimes she doesn't feel like she does. After having her normal seat taken away and being stuck with a table of boys, who like to have burping contests, she decides to try to make friends. Her dad has been doing a lot of baking at home and so sends her to school with a huge box of his cookies."

Postreading: "So Zoe finally feels like she's done something good. The other kids are excited by all the delicious cookies. But then once again, it backfires. Has this ever happened to you? How did you handle it? Do you think she was wrong to bring the cookies?"

Purpose for choosing: My hope with this passage is that the students will see themselves somewhat in Zoe. I think every child has had this kind of moment. I would think after reading these three passages students would see the humor in the story and be interested in learning more about this unique girl and her parents.