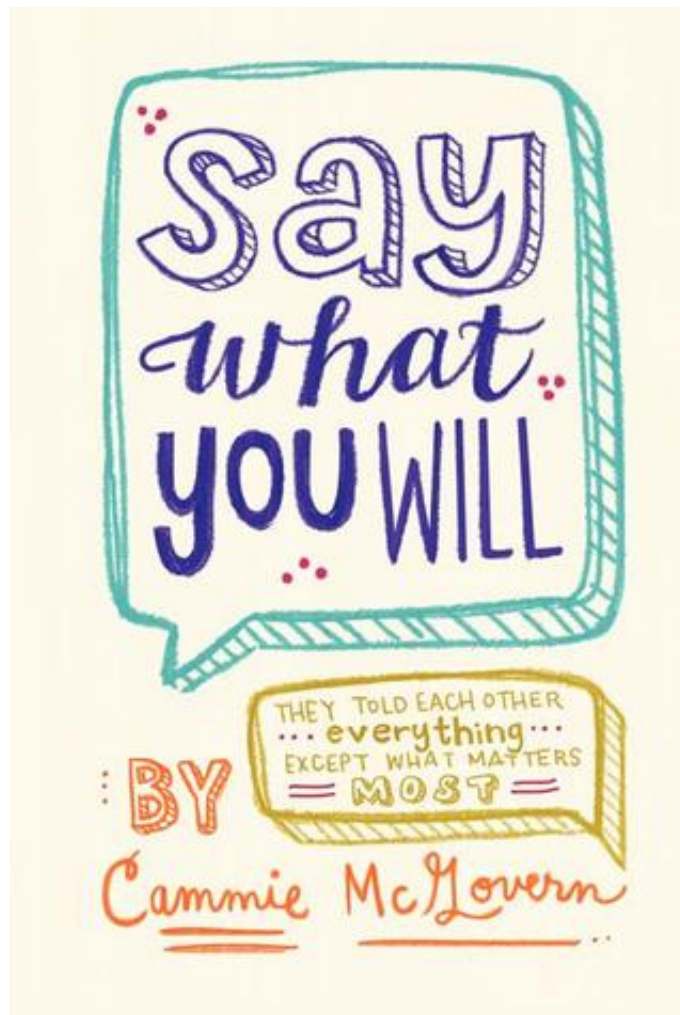


Review: Say What You Will by Cammie McGovern



John Green's The Fault in Our Stars meets Rainbow Rowell's Eleanor & Park in this beautifully written, incredibly honest, and emotionally poignant novel. Cammie McGovern's insightful young adult debut is a heartfelt and heartbreaking story about how we can all feel lost until we find someone who loves us because of our faults, not in spite of them.

Born with cerebral palsy, Amy can't walk without a walker, talk without a voice box, or even fully control her facial expressions. Plagued by obsessive-compulsive disorder, Matthew is consumed with repeated thoughts, neurotic rituals, and crippling fear. Both in desperate need of someone to help them reach out to the world, Amy and Matthew are more alike than either ever realized.

When Amy decides to hire student aides to help her in her senior year at Coral Hills High School, these two teens are thrust into each other's lives. As they begin to spend time with

each other, what started as a blossoming friendship eventually grows into something neither expected.

I chose this book because I've read very books featuring disabled characters, and none that I can recall where a disabled character was the main focus. As an able-bodied, able-minded person, I'm not qualified to judge whether Amy and Matthew are good representations of disabled teens, but strictly as characters, I liked them both a lot, Amy especially. She's incredibly intelligent and ambitious and has an endearingly sarcastic sense of humor, but because she has limited mobility, can't communicate without a voice box, and is always accompanied by adult aides, her social life is nonexistent. Matthew is similarly lonely; since his parents' divorce, he's begun performing odd rituals like washing his hands up to the elbows and tapping on lockers, which makes him much more anxious about how others perceive him. When Matthew becomes one of Amy's peer helpers, they're surprised by how well they understand each other and how they're able to let their guard down and be themselves in a way they can't with anyone else.

As they get to know each other better, Amy begins to help Matthew with his mental limitations as he helps her with her physical ones; she gives him "assignments" that require him to step outside his comfort zone. Not all of their interaction revolves around their disabilities -- they do typical teenage things like going to prom and talking about sex, and the various e-mail and text conversations interspersed throughout the book are a nice touch that makes their relationship seem more authentic. I was worried that when they inevitably fell in love, it would feel forced or rushed, but fortunately it felt very natural.

The contrast between mental and physical disabilities is one of the major themes of the book. Mental illness is often treated as if it was a less serious issue than physical illness, so I found it very interesting how, in many ways, Matthew was more limited by his OCD than Amy was by her cerebral palsy. Amy is a brilliant student who doesn't let her disability stop her from making big plans for her future, while Matthew finds it difficult to make any plans for his future because the mere thought of college fills him with crippling anxiety. My knowledge of OCD is very limited, so I can't say how realistic Matthew's symptoms are, but there's no question that McGovern portrays it as a serious problem -- he has an inner voice telling him people will die if he doesn't perform his rituals.

Unfortunately, in the last third of the book, things start to fall apart. Amy and Matthew have a fight, Amy goes away to college and they don't talk to each other for months, a major plot twist is introduced, and they magically make make up -- but there are still 24 pages left, so they have yet another fight, which gets even less resolution.

As I did with my previous two reads, I searched for published reviews of the book before writing my own. I was most interested in disabled people's reactions, so I found [Disabled in Kidlit's](#) review very helpful regarding what McGovern got right and wrong in her portrayals of the main characters'

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disabilities. The reviewers all agree that she got more wrong than right, which is a shame.

Despite my enjoyment of the first two-thirds, I would hesitate to recommend this book. McGovern challenges some of the harmful misconceptions about disabilities, but she reinforces others, such as disabled people needing someone to "fix" them (the entire basis of Amy and Matthew's relationship). This coupled with the clumsy last third brings me to the conclusion that [Say What You Will](#) is a case of the idea of the book being better than the execution.

Rating: 2.5 out of 5 stars