

Fipps, Lisa. *And Then, Boom!* [STARRED REVIEW] 256p. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen. May 2024. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780593406328.

Gr 5 Up—This latest verse novel from Fipps offers an equally heartwarming and heart-shattering story of how family is more than just the people one shares blood with, but the people who are there when life goes awry. Joseph Oak is an 11-year-old boy who lives with Grandmum and Mom—at least when Mom doesn't have her "itch" to leave. Life is challenging at times, but Grandmum always knows just how to make Joseph feel safe and taken care of, even with limited resources. When Grandmum is no longer able to care for him, Joseph endures struggles related to poverty and housing insecurity that no child should face alone. Thankfully the community around him of friends, teachers, and neighbors do what they can based on the tiny sliver of truth Joseph allows them to know. But even superheroes need help to handle the unexpected villains of life, whether it be a tornado, having enough food, or a bad tooth. This novel will resonate deeply with readers; Fipps creates a lyrical portrait of Joseph's honest vulnerability that evocatively empathizes with his situation. Scenes with his friends and neighbors tug on the heartstrings and the conversations feel authentic in nature. Touching on themes of poverty, abandonment, and food insecurity, this novel will inspire readers to support those struggling to get by.

VERDICT An excellent realistic novel in verse for all libraries serving middle grade students.

—Lindsey Morrison