

***Orbiting Jupiter* by Gary D. Schmidt**

Reviewed by Esther Aardsma

Joseph Brook is in trouble, and it seems like everyone around him is convinced that he *is* trouble—except for his new foster family Mr. and Mrs. Hurd, and their son Jackson, through whose eyes the story is told.

Thing is, Joseph tried to kill a *teacher*. And he was sent to Stone Mountain, the juvenile penitentiary. And even though he just turned fourteen, he's got a *baby*.

Isn't any kid like that trouble?

Orbiting Jupiter (2015) is a stirring story of loss, heartache, and beauty from ashes. As Joseph slowly opens up, his new foster family learns that underneath all the labels the world struggles to see past, he is a fragile thing of *loyalty* and *love*—and he wants more than anything to meet his infant daughter, Jupiter. Can the Hurds help him in his quest to see her? Can Joseph succeed in his new life in a new school with new kids and new teachers?

There are two uses of the word “hell” as an expletive, although most foul language is described as “bad words I [Jackson as the narrator] wouldn't be allowed to say.” Schmidt includes very difficult themes of child abuse and manipulation; drug use; underage sex (and a resultant child); bullying by both kids and teachers; a fatal vehicle accident; fatal medical complications; dangers of thin river ice, with the resultant death of an animal—and near-death experience of humans; real and threatened violence, including with weapons; and elopements of a foster child involving the police. While Schmidt does tackle these difficult topics, he does so in a manner appropriate for the mature child while weaving a beautiful, challenging story.

As unchurched Joseph Brook asks upon hearing the Christmas story for the first time, what good were the angels if they didn't stop the bad things from happening—echoing the quiet whispers of the story's underlying theme: will we be the angels in someone else's story? Or will we be the bad things? Who will we choose to be?