

Racing the Clouds

Sydney Dunlap

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In Sydney Dunlap's stirring novel *Racing the Clouds*, a girl navigates complex family relationships on her path to forgiveness.

After a sudden move from Philadelphia to rural Virginia with her father, thirteen-year-old Sage's world becomes even more fragile. She receives a letter from her maternal grandparents asking her to visit them in Ohio. She's never met them, though. In fact, Sage knows little about her mother's life before the accident that triggered her opioid addiction.

Blaming herself for her mother's accident, Sage decides to visit her grandparents, hoping to mend the wrongs that keep her family apart. Making a new friend and rescuing a stray dog along the way, Sage embarks on an emotional odyssey to face what she's been avoiding.

Sage is a compelling heroine. She loves music, attends a concert almost every weekend, and enjoys "sandwiches with bananas in them." Her playfulness is balanced by her tender bond with her father and her sensitivity to others' feelings. Her vulnerability sparks poignant reflections on her memories, captured by recurring reimaginings of her mother's accident. These what-ifs haunt Sage as she circles around the trauma and misplaced guilt surrounding her mother's addiction. And the supporting characters help to weave together a complete image of Sage's fractured family.

The book's back matter is comprehensive, addressing opioid addiction and substance use disorder. Thoughtful questions ranging from "What are opioids?" to "What support groups are available for family members of people experiencing addiction?" are answered in an age-appropriate manner. A twenty-question discussion guide closes the book, further exploring its themes, character arcs, and the audience's personal connections to the narrative.

A riveting novel with crucial themes, *Racing the Clouds* lays bare the communal effects of drug addiction as a girl seeks generational healing.

BROOKE SHANNON (January / February 2025)

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