



## ★ **The Gray City**

**Torben Kuhlmann**

**Torben Kuhlmann, Illustrator**

**David Henry Wilson, Translator**

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In Torben Kuhlmann's novel *The Gray City*, a determined girl seeks out color in a desaturated world.

After moving into a new home, Robin realizes that her new city is absent of all colors but gray. In defiance, she resolves to always wear her bright yellow raincoat. That and a drawing in bright colors lands her in daily detention with Alani, a boy who also rejects the Gray City's dullness. Alani introduces Robin to his uncle's band; it indulges in music and color in secret once a week. As Robin continues to seek out hidden color in the city, she and her new friends unravel the conspiracy behind Gray Works, the ruling factory that enforces colorlessness.

Robin is a valiant lead who defies the overwhelming grayness representing "Desirable Social Behavior: Conformity, Obedience, Discipline" (the title of the educational film shown every day in detention). Curious and unwilling to succumb to the pressure to fit in, she follows a rainbow to a library with colorful books containing hidden knowledge, including on how different hues combine to create new colors. Individualism and inquisitiveness prove crucial to challenging the tyranny of Gray Works.

The vast watercolor illustrations are an immersive, splendid accompaniment to Robin's captivating feats. Even in a city of monotonous gray, the pictures brim with details, conveying the unique texture of different materials (including cloth, wood, and concrete) and hinting at the concealed multicolor world underneath the city. Facial expressions are varied and fluid, revealing multifaceted emotions despite the city's overwhelming attempts to intimidate its inhabitants into colorlessness.

An imaginative tale encouraging vibrancy and children's discovery, *The Gray City* demonstrates how gray is more than just a plain mixture of black and white.

ISABELLA ZHOU (September / October 2024)

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