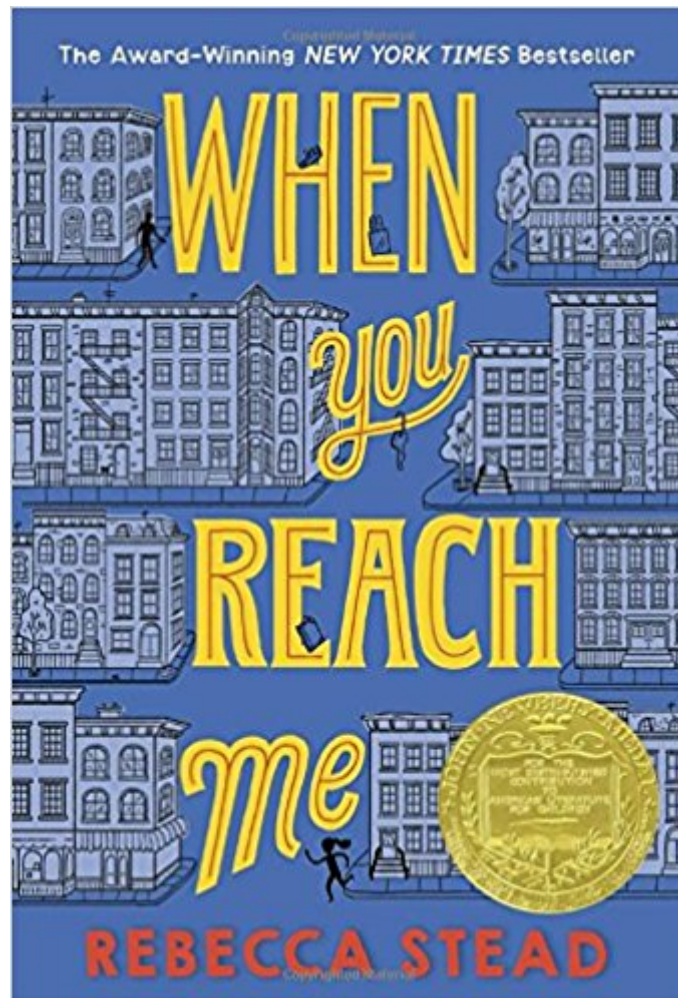




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# When You Reach Me (Yearling Newbery)



## Synopsis

This Newbery Medal winner that has a fantastic puzzle at its heart has been called “smart and mesmerizing,” (The New York Times), “superb” (The Wall Street Journal), and “incandescent” (The Washington Post). When Miranda starts receiving mysterious notes, she doesn’t know what to do. The notes tell her that she must write a letter, a true story, and that she can’t share her mission with anyone—not even her best friend, Sal. It would be easy to ignore the strange messages, except that whoever is leaving them has an uncanny ability to predict the future. If that’s the case, then Miranda has an even bigger problem—because the notes tell her that someone is going to die, and she might be too late to stop it. “Lovely and almost impossibly clever.” The Philadelphia Inquirer Winner of the Boston Globe Horn Book Award for Fiction A New York Times Bestseller and Notable Book

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 750L (What’s this?)

Series: Yearling Newbery

Paperback: 224 pages

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Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 838 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #3,398 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 in Books > Children’s Books > Geography & Cultures > Where We Live > City Life #25 in Books > Children’s Books > Mysteries & Detectives #126 in Books > Children’s Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Friendship

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Best of the Month, July 2009: Shortly after sixth-grader Miranda and her best friend Sal part ways, for some inexplicable reason her once familiar world turns upside down. Maybe it’s because she’s

caught up in reading *A Wrinkle in Time* and trying to understand time travel, or perhaps it's because she's been receiving mysterious notes which accurately predict the future. Rebecca Stead's poignant novel, *When You Reach Me*, captures the interior monologue and observations of kids who are starting to recognize and negotiate the complexities of friendship and family, class and identity. Set in New York City in 1979, the story takes its cue from beloved Manhattan tales for middle graders like E.L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, and Norma Klein's *Mom the Wolfman and Me*. Like those earlier novels, *When You Reach Me* will stir the imaginations of young readers curious about day-to-day life in a big city.

--Lauren Nemroff Exclusive: A Q&A with Rebecca Stead

We had the opportunity to chat with Rebecca Stead over e-mail about her second novel, *When You Reach Me*. Here's what Rebecca had to say about growing up in New York City, meeting Madeleine L'Engle, and how writing a novel is a lot like solving a puzzle.

.com: *When You Reach Me* captures Manhattan in the late 70s perfectly. Why did you choose to set a book for young readers today in the not-too-distant (but very different) past?

Rebecca Stead: I grew up in New York in the seventies and eighties. When I was in elementary school, I became acquainted with a mysterious sort of character, who I wanted to use for this story. When I began to write about him, I was suddenly remembering all kinds of details and moments and places from my own childhood and happily writing them into the book. And in this way the book's setting sort of rose up around the plot. There's another reason I set the story in the past, which is that I wanted to show a world of kids with a great deal of autonomy, and I wasn't sure that it would ring true in a modern New York setting. For better or for worse, life is different now.

.com: Madeleine L'Engle's classic *A Wrinkle in Time* plays an important role in *When You Reach Me*. Why did you choose to pay homage to this particular classic in your own book?

Rebecca Stead: I loved *A Wrinkle in Time* as a child. I didn't know why I loved it, and I didn't want to know why. I remember meeting Madeleine L'Engle once at a bookstore and just staring at her as if she were a magical person. What I love about L'Engle's book now is how it deals with so much fragile inner-human stuff at the same time that it takes on life's big questions. There's something fearless about this book. It started out as a small detail in Miranda's story, a sort of talisman, and one I thought I would eventually jettison, because you can't just toss *A Wrinkle in Time* in there casually. But as my story went deeper, I saw that I didn't want to let the book go. I talked about it with my editor, Wendy Lamb, and to others close to the story. And what we decided was that if we were going to bring L'Engle's story in, we needed to make the book's relationship to

Miranda's story stronger. So I went back to *A Wrinkle in Time* and read it again and again, trying to see it as different characters in my own story might (sounds crazy, but it's possible!). And those readings led to new connections. .com: I love the way you incorporate hints of science fiction into the ordinary events of Miranda's life. What scientific possibilities (or realities) did you find most interesting growing up? Rebecca Stead: I thought about time a lot when I was a kid. Not in a mystical way--it was just the passing of time, the idea of time stretching out forever, that interested me. I used to wonder, "What will my room look like on my thirtieth birthday? What will be the first words I say in the year 2000? When I'm forty, will I remember the I am now? Will I remember this moment?" I guess part of it was thinking about how we leave ourselves behind in a way, which I think we do, throughout our lives. I was also really interested in what is "knowable." There's a certain number of people alive on this planet right now, and it's a simple number that anyone could write down or say aloud, and so in some sense that number exists as a truth, yet we can't know it. That's the kind of thing I thought about when I was Miranda's age. .com: Each of the book's chapters is just a few pages in length, but each scene is fully drawn. Why did you decide to write the story in this way? And why do most of the chapters begin with the words "Things That..." or "Things On..."? Rebecca Stead: A lot of my writing is fragmented for some reason. It must be something about the way my brain works. I used to write short stories, and this was the form they frequently took. When I started writing my first novel, *First Light*, a lot of the raw material was also fragmented, and I had to sort of develop them into traditional chapters, which was what worked best for that story. But *When You Reach Me* is a little like a puzzle, and I loved the challenge of smoothing these small pieces until the whole thing fit together just right. The chapter names are (mostly) the names of categories inspired by a game show called *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. As she tells her story, Miranda is helping her mother get ready to be a contestant on the show. They practice every night, and the game sort of seeps into her general thinking. The book is about all sorts of assumptions and categories we carry in our heads, so it felt right on that level, too. .com: At the very beginning of the novel, we learn that Miranda's mom is going to be a contestant on the 1970's TV game show *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. Without giving away the ending, why is this opportunity so important for them as a family? Rebecca Stead: They need the money! Part of what's happening for Miranda during this year is that she gets pushed outside of her formerly tiny world. Not far, but enough for her to start thinking about class, and the way other people live. She starts to see the way she lives in a new way, and has to deal with that. It's the beginning of that kind of awareness for her, and so the money they hope to win has a lot of meaning for her, but

it's a meaning that changes. .com: Is there some significance to the way that Miranda, her mom, and her mom's boyfriend Richard all prepare for the big event? Rebecca Stead: They have a pretty nice system, which starts with their neighbor, Louisa, who scribbles down each day's Pyramid clues at her nursing job because she's the only one with access to a television at lunchtime. After her shift, she leaves the clues with Miranda, who copies them down on cards. Miranda and Richard take turns feeding clues to Miranda's mom while the other one keeps time. They operate as one kind of New York City family, which is probably the important thing. .com: Why do Miranda and her friends Annemarie and Colin like working in Jimmy's sandwich shop during lunch hour? Especially since he doesn't pay them. Why don't they hang out at school instead? Rebecca Stead: It doesn't feel like work to them. They are twelve, and all they want to do is see what it's like to be out in the world together. It's the most exciting thing ever, except when it's boring. Hanging out at school means sitting in the lunchroom, which is not fun. They couldn't even sit together there, because Colin would always be sitting with the boys. .com: Do you think latch-key kids like Miranda are any different today than they were back in the 70s? How about city kids versus suburban kids? Rebecca Stead: I'm now raising two kids of my own in New York City, and I think a lot about the differences between today's "preteen experience" and the one I had. Kids are generally less independent now, I think. My friends and I had a lot more freedom than I let my own kids have. The community just doesn't support it anymore. Now we have 24-hour-a-day news and twenty-two different police dramas that make constant fear seem kind of reasonable. And the internet has changed everything, obviously. Kids socialize in cyberspace now. I've heard that the suburban experience has also changed a lot. My husband grew up in the suburbs and his parents hardly ever knew where he was at age twelve. Those days are gone, I think. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Starred Review. Grade 5-8 Sixth-grader Miranda lives in 1978 New York City with her mother, and her life compass is Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. When she receives a series of enigmatic notes that claim to want to save her life, she comes to believe that they are from someone who knows the future. Miranda spends considerable time observing a raving vagrant who her mother calls the laughing man and trying to find the connection between the notes and her everyday life. Discerning readers will realize the ties between Miranda's mystery and L'Engle's plot, but will enjoy hints of fantasy and descriptions of middle school dynamics. Stead's novel is as much about character as story. Miranda's voice rings true with its faltering attempts at maturity and

observation. The story builds slowly, emerging naturally from a sturdy premise. As Miranda reminisces, the time sequencing is somewhat challenging, but in an intriguing way. The setting is consistently strong. The stores and even the streets in Miranda's neighborhood act as physical entities and impact the plot in tangible ways. This unusual, thought-provoking mystery will appeal to several types of readers.

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I had no idea what to expect from *When You Reach Me*, but I ended up loving it. Perhaps as an adult reader, I would give this four stars, but I'm trying to view children's books through the lens of a young reader. I know this is a book I would have been obsessed with as a kid. Miranda is a great protagonist, and her world is a realistic one. The story itself is smart - it doesn't attempt to talk down to the reader, but rather gives kids a lot credit. There were a couple of loose ends that I would have liked to see tied up in the end, but overall, I was happy with the way it ended. I'll definitely be looking for more of Rebecca Stead's books at the library!

I know I'm in the minority here. The characters are interesting, and it has an interesting twist at the end. However, it took a long time to get there with a story that doesn't really seem to go anywhere. Though I respect that it has a lot of merit from a literary standpoint, I read this to my 5th grade son, and it was hard for me to get him engaged in the story. It could be one of those award-winning children's books that the parents enjoy and appreciate more than the kids.

I was eager to read this book because it won a Newberry award, but it wasn't as exciting as I had hoped it would be. It may be in part due to the fact that I have been reading mostly YA books and this one involves a lot less of the elements of YA that I'm used to, but I still enjoyed it and finished it in a few hours! I am usually horrible at predicting what will happen in stories, but I had a hunch that the ending would relate to the laughing man and time travel. I will admit my brain was stuck at some of time travel conversation, but I got it overall. I liked how everything tied together at the end; everything was explained and made sense. Very cute story.

I purchased this because several literary agents mentioned it as a favorite. And, the premise of the story interested me. Once the introduction of the game show, how it works and details about how the mother is preparing for it passed, I couldn't put the novel down. The author managed to bring in

so many details about her characters in such a natural way. All the while she wove pieces of the story itself together as beautifully as a pretty braid and propelled it to a tension-filled ending. I would recommend this story to kids and adults. It contains some good societal messages and information, brings us back to a time when kids could go out and about on their own without much parental policing and is just a really neat and well-told story.

A Wrinkle In Time has always been one of my favorite books; this is one of the few books that has grabbed me in the same way. It's NOT a copy or imitation; it's nothing like AWiT, but AWIT does play a huge role. I'm just going to leave it at that. Rebecca Stead, if you're reading this, I wrote a fan letter to Madeleine L'Engle in 1985. She answered--and her signature was just the way you describe.

When Miranda receives the first mysterious letter, she tries to convince herself it was meant for someone else. When she gets the second one, she knows there was no mistake. As she tries to decode the clues in the notes, the events in her life reveal clues of their own. The two weave together until they form a startling intersection that will change her future. Beautifully written. Miranda is a character you won't soon forget.

My folks didn't know what kind of books to buy me when I was a kid because they hadn't been readers. So they started buying me Newberry winners and they were all great, which is why this book shouldn't be a surprise- but it is. Heartfelt, complex, smart and fantastical- it's a mystery in many parts, including the bizarre language of middle-school age friendship and time travel. Highly recommended (for adults, not just kids).

I liked the book a lot it was well written. Although it got confusing at times and reading it for a second time I understand it a lot more but I think that's kind of the point. The author wants you to be confused along with the main character until the end when everything makes sense and is revealed. Very good book overall

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