



# The Friendship Riddle

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## **The Friendship Riddle** Megan Frazer Blakemore

Acclaimed author Megan Frazer Blakemore's charming new mystery is perfect for fans of *Chasing Vermeer*. Ruth Mudd-O'Flaherty has been a lone wolf at Frontenac Consolidated Middle School ever since her best friend, Charlotte, ditched her for "cooler" friends. Who needs friends when you have fantasy novels? Roaming the stacks of her town's library is enough for Ruth. Until she finds a note in an old book . . . and in that note is a riddle, one that Ruth can't solve alone. With an epic quest before her, Ruth admits she needs help, the kind that usually comes from friends. Lena and Coco, two kids in her class could be an option, but allowing them in will require courage. Ruth must decide: Is solving this riddle worth opening herself up again?

In this surprising and emotionally satisfying journey through the ups and downs of middle school, Ruth finds that even the bravest heroes need true friends by their side.

## **The Friendship Riddle Details**

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Author : Megan Frazer Blakemore

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# From Reader Review The Friendship Riddle for online ebook

## Heather Gunnell says

Staff Pick

This book is full of friendship, fantasy, and puzzles. This is a great story about growing up and dealing with change - change at school, with friends, and in life. Read along with Ruth and her rag-tag team of friends as they solve the puzzle.

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## Brandy Painter says

I think I would have LOVED this book if it had focused more on the friendship and the riddles. However, there were parts that took up a lot of pages that had nothing to do with either and most of those parts were unnecessary to the development. And in some of them I felt like I was being lectured at.

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## A says

A fun premise, but it didn't deliver.

I know there are kids in this situation, but it is not normal for a child to have two parents of the same gender and I never want to teach that it is. That seems to be the underlying message in this book. Also, there were several other things that my little sister said came up that she felt were inappropriate, and she's **12**! This is not something I would recommend for children

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## Julie says

No one does characters like Megan Frazer Blakemore. She takes her time with her books, so you never feel hit over the head with the plot, but you do have long moments to get to know the characters so well. They are all so real, and so relatable, that you can't help but be pulled along when the plot pace inevitably picks up. I really loved the historical fiction of *The Water Castle* and *Spy Catchers of Maple Hill*, and this book shows that Blakemore can do middle grade contemporary characters just as well.

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## Lesley Burnap says

A kid who doesn't want to grow up too fast, on the outs with her best friend due to middle school growing pains and saddled with a quest that she cannot solve alone...Ruth manages to move through tween-life while being true to herself. Fans of *The Penderwicks* (Birdsall) and Ana Wright (Keating's *My Life in a Zoo* series) will enjoy following Ruth Mudd-O'Flaherty on a fantastic journey fully grounded in the contemporary world.

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## Celeste\_pewter says

I'm a big fan of books with mystery-solving/riddle elements - think *The Westing Game* - so *The Friendship Riddle* made it onto my list, as soon as I knew that the title was coming out.

Author Megan Fraser Blakemore introduces us to Ruth Mudd-Flaherty, a young girl who hasn't quite figured out her place at her middle school, especially now that she's grown apart from her former best friend. While Ruth focuses on winning the spelling bee to try and change how people see her, a chance encounter with a mysterious riddle hidden in a library book quickly sends her on an adventure...

There are so many things to love about *The Friendship Riddle*, beginning with Blakemore's recognition that the struggle to fit in at school can begin at any age. While Ruth keeps optimistic and occupied with her classes, Blakemore does a fine job of showing her internal debate as she tries to understand just why she is no longer close with former best friend Charlotte.

However, as Ruth begins delving into both the spelling bee and starts figuring out the riddles, Blakemore also begins to show how having the willingness to take on new events can bring new friends into one's life, including people that a person might have assumed that they didn't have much in common with. Ruth develops friendships with likable secondary characters, who both bolster her, and help her grow in confidence.

Outside of Ruth's main character arc, Blakemore does a great job of incorporating diverse elements into the novel, while also emphasizing the importance of individuality. Ruth's mom and mum and Charlotte's dads are much-welcomed additions to the book, especially as Blakemore simply doesn't make a big deal about either relationship. Similarly, Charlotte is adopted and of Chinese heritage, but it's more of an interesting facet of her background, rather than a defining characteristic.

As for individuality, Blakemore reiterates time and again, that even if you think that you're the only one who thinks a certain way, odds are, you aren't alone. Without giving spoilers away, Ruth's quest - especially the endgame - is a wonderful reminder of both the merits of beating to your own drum, and just how high and far that drum may eventually take you.

The one area where readers may find issue with the book, is with Blakemore's fairly descriptive scenes involving bras, breasts and other puberty-related concerns. While I personally thought that the book did a nice job of touching on many of the bodily concerns of a young girl, another reviewer pointed out concerns that those issues might limit the overall audience of the book.

Ultimately, I think that it's up to the age and maturity of the reader, to determine how a potential reader might choose to handle those aspects of the story.

**Bottom line:** As someone who was wowed by *The Westing Game* when she first read it, it was a delight to find an equally immersive and diverse novel in *The Friendship Riddle*. Not only are the riddles that Ruth and her newfound friends team up to solve entertaining and

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## Ms. Yingling says

Ruth is growing up in a small town in Maine with her Mom, who is a doctor in Rockport, and Mum, who travels a lot with her job as a software trainer. Ruth's former best friend was Charlotte, who lives in an apartment over the town library, which was redesigned by her one father. Her other father works in the library. Charlotte has become pretty and popular, and would rather be with Melinda than Ruth, who doesn't care what she wears and is still obsessed with the Taryn Greenbottom books by reclusive writer Harriet Wexler. Ruth is invited to a mortifying play date with Lucas (who sounds like he might be on the autism spectrum), and starts to connect with the quirky Lena. She also makes a friend of Coco (Christopher), who offers to help her study for the local spelling bee. The big mystery in Ruth's life centers around a succession of notes found in the library and various other places. These notes seem old, and have a number of riddles that must be solved. With her new friends, Ruth makes pretty good headway on the clues. When dramatic snobs ruin the library, she is forced to make an uneasy truce with Charlotte. In the end, an unlikely source is discovered for the notes.

Strengths: Nice diversity that isn't harped on-- two nontraditional families, and Charlotte has been adopted from China. Ruth's friendships develop in an understandable way. Her Mom is pushy about certain things (school lunches, the locker room), and that embarrasses Ruth. The mystery, while improbably, is interesting.

Weaknesses: This would have been a great book to hand to readers of either genders, except that there are lengthy discussions about Ruth wearing a bra and other puberty things that even I don't want to read about. Taking those out would have brought this to a more manageable length as well.

What I really think: I didn't buy that notes had been floating around for 20 years, and that they were dreamt up by someone with whom Ruth was familiar. Taryn Greenbottom? There were also too many details about the spelling bee-- reading lists of words was boring.

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## Stephanie says

First impression: OK, I only just started this, but I already have to say: oh, wow, what an immersive, wonderful voice the heroine has - and oh, how fun it is to read about an MG heroine who's a fantasy fan! I've seen a lot of books where the \*boys\* are fantasy fans, but this is the first one I can remember in a long while with a girl fantasy-reader.

Anyway! Back to reading now. But I was too excited not to share that much already. :)

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Later: And now that I've finished reading, here is my real review:

Ohhhh did I love this book! And ohhh did I relate to the heroine, Ruth, who is a smart, geeky, fantasy-fan eleven-year-old who has a hard time fitting in at school, who's oblivious to fashion and social rules, and who is deeply, painfully lonely after being abandoned by her lifelong best friend, who's moved into the popular crowd and left Ruth behind as an embarrassment. Ruth's built a hard, sarcastic and protective shell to cope with that loneliness...but that shell (along with the books that she escapes into but also hides inside) is going to put off any new friends unless they're stubborn and persistent enough to force their way through it.

Luckily, they are! And her new friends are all AWESOME. I loved, loved, loved the characters in this book - even including her former best friend, Charlotte, who is a really well-drawn, complex character who isn't evil at all, just insecure and struggling to find her own place and identity. I love all the moments where we see

her continued love for Ruth shining through, and Ruth can't help still caring about Charlotte, too. But then the scenes between them...oh. They're painful in just exactly the right, most emotionally truthful way.

But Ruth's NEW friends - ! Oh, they are fabulous. I loved watching her "motley crew" assemble around her - lots of other fantastic, smart, quirky kids, all geeky in their own different ways, debating the laws of time travel and magic as they band together to follow a quest of riddle-hunting all across town. Ruth starts out this book deeply lonely but ends up surrounded by her tribe, and I LOVE stories of people finding their tribes. This one was just perfect.

In fact, my only quibble about this whole book is the packaging for it. I think the title feels a little bit bland, giving no clue of all the quirky, wonderful, rich and unusual stuff inside the book, and the cover - while cute - makes it look like a love story between Ruth and a boy. There is, in fact, a (wonderful) boy, Coco, who becomes her friend in this book and who is interested in being more than her friend, but he's no more important a character in the story than her new best friend Lena, who is flamboyant, outspoken, feminist, and fabulous and is the one who really drags Ruth (kicking and screaming) out of her shell. And of course both Lena and Coco are just part of the big crew of friends who've banded together by the end through their shared quest, which is part of the whole theme of the book - it's definitely not just a boy-girl book (and Ruth is annoyed by people trying to get her involved in thinking of the world in a boy-girl way, which makes the cover feel more ironic to me). Also, the cover image of two white kids doesn't give any clues to all the different kinds of diversity in this book. (Not only is there ethnic diversity among the main characters, which I wouldn't have guessed from that cover image, but also Ruth lives with her mom and her mum, and she's not the only one in town with two parents of the same gender. It's really not the monolithic setting that you'd guess from the cover.)

But! Obviously the cover is the choice of the publisher, not the author, and there honestly isn't a single thing I'd change about this story and these characters. I just loved it from beginning to end, sank right into it, and came out certain that (a) this is one of my favorite books of 2015; and (b) I have to read Megan Frazer Blakemore's other books straightaway!

There were so many great lines in this book, but I didn't stop reading to make notes of them, so I'll just include the line right at the bottom of the first page that sold me on this book immediately:

"These are the kinds of thoughts that make my teachers write comments on my report cards like 'Mind tends to wander,' 'A bit in her own world,' and 'Reality does little to faze Ruth.'"

...And yes, I admit, I did personally get reports much like this at that age, too! So when I read that line in the opening, I knew this book was For Me. But whether or not you relate to that line, you should really, really try this book for the wonderful voice and the immersive storytelling and the fabulous characters. I loved it!

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## **Bluerose's Heart says**

This is a book I'd recommend parents reading first. Ruth has a mom and a mum(homosexual marriage). Her friend Charlotte has two daddies. I'm sure this will be thrilling to many, since there aren't many books that create this form of diversity. Ruth does mention her "sperm donor dad", though, and the fact that he "put down opera as an interest". (page 37-ARC) Depending on the age/maturity of your child, you might want to be prepared for questions if your child reads this book.

\*I was provided an ARC, in exchange for my honest opinion.

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### **Akilah says**

2.5 stars, rounding up

This cover is cute but is really misleading in a way that I don't think Ruth would be happy about.

I liked this well enough. My daughter went through a similar situation with her best friend in sixth grade, so I couldn't help but think of the two of them and how they drifted apart much like Ruth and Charlotte.

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### **M. says**

I enjoyed this book, but I think it's aimed at an older audience than suggested, perhaps a relatively easy reading book for a middle schooler. Ruth, our protagonist, is struggling with the end of a close friendship with Charlotte and she has to decide whether she wants to be a lone wolf or part of a different group of friends. Ruth finds parallels in her favorite author's writing and the book includes a lot of introspection, more appropriate to middle schoolers than to middle elementary. At the same time, Ruth finds clues to a puzzle while helping out at the local library. She and her new friends have to figure out the clues and solve the puzzle. A third plot involves the local spelling bee--Ruth wants to compete but so does her ex-best friend.

The kicker for many parents will be Ruth's 2 moms and sperm donor dad and Charlotte's 2 dads. There are a lot of children out there who will relate very well to a situation they recognize and may be part of, but there are other children who will have questions for parents that the parents may not be ready to answer.

Middle school, girls more than boys but there are interesting boy characters as well that many boys will enjoy.

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### **Ellie says**

This book was just my jam. Snowpocalypse + shifting middle school friendships + quests around a small town + interest in fantasy without being fantasy + awkward heroine who likes nerdy things + realistic library portrayal (shelf lists! Dewey!) + a spelling bee (even though I'm not a great speller, this part seemed well done)

Bra shopping and the very beginning of boy girl feelings makes this a good choice for 5th grade and up, I'd give this one to someone who likes fantasy but has to read a realistic fiction book or someone who just really loves the library and is kind of maybe having some awkward times. Hopefully these kids find me in the library so I can pass this book along to them.

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## **Cheryl says**

I usually have a lot of good luck reading children books. They are fun, exciting reads and the characters are good. However this book barely kept me wide-eyed and awake. This made me sad. I like book themed stories. So I was looking forward to reading this book and finding out all about the riddle in the book. Yet the children in this story did not connect with me and there was just a lot of talking. It seemed to take long periods of time before any mention was put on the riddle. By this time I was so over this book that I put it down and picked up a different one to read.

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## **Kate says**

Ruth Mudd-O'Flaherty is feeling alone. Her best friend Charlotte has abandoned her during the first year of middle school, leaving her with only the books of Harriet Wexler as company. One day, she finds a mysterious note in a library book while doing some shelf-reading for the librarian. When she discovers Charlotte has found a similar one (but won't work with her on solving the riddle), she sets about putting together a new group of friends to help her.

Good grief, did this book ever drag. I thought that once Ruth found the first riddle it would set the plot moving, but instead it went off onto boring tangents about spelling bees and a cute boy who was into Ruth and Ruth's mothers' relationship and training bra shopping. There was way too much irrelevant dialogue between random characters and not enough forward momentum on the plot for me to keep caring. I flipped ahead enough to get the gist of the riddle plot's resolution and then threw in the towel. If it couldn't keep me interested, I doubt it can keep children interested.

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## **Melissapalmer404 says**

Book #36 Read in 2015

The Friendship Riddle by Megan Frazer Blakemore

This was a good young adult mystery, perfect for upper elementary and middle school readers. Ruth finds clues/notes in old library books at her neighborhood library which seem to lead to more clues. Since Ruth loves reading about people going on quests, she decides this will be her quest. She ends up getting some help from newfound friends of hers and the group try to find the spots where the clues will lead them to. I enjoyed that the young characters were smart and readers. I have read several of this author's books and she keeps that theme throughout them all. I received a copy of this book from the Amazon Vine program in exchange for a honest review.

<http://melissasbookpicks.blogspot.com>

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