



Dear Rachel Maddow

Adrienne Kisner

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Brynn Haper's life has one steady force--Rachel Maddow.

She watches her daily, and after writing to Rachel for a school project--and actually getting a response--Brynn starts drafting e-mails to Rachel but never sending them. Brynn tells Rachel about breaking up with her first serious girlfriend, about her brother Nick's death, about her passive mother and even worse stepfather, about how she's stuck in remedial courses at school and is considering dropping out.

Then Brynn is confronted with a moral dilemma. One student representative will be allowed to have a voice among the administration in the selection of a new school superintendent. Brynn's archnemesis, Adam, and ex-girlfriend, Sarah, believe only Honors students are worthy of the selection committee seat. Brynn feels all students deserve a voice. When she runs for the position, the knives are out. So she begins to ask herself: What Would Rachel Maddow Do?

Dear Rachel Maddow Details

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Author : Adrienne Kisner

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From Reader Review Dear Rachel Maddow for online ebook

Fadwa (Word Wonders) says

This story was pretty damn good. Heaviee than i expected. A lot heavier. But it's real, heartbreaking but also hopeful. Also, it's hella gay!

Jane (It'sJaneLindsey) says

I'm so confused as to how to rate this. 3 stars? 3.5? I loved the concept and much of the subject matter discussed, but I can't say that I actually enjoyed this book. I'm very torn!

K8 says

“How are you doing?”

Just say you’re fine, Brynn. Just say it. It’s what people do. Be a person, Brynn.

“Same old suck. Different day.” I cringed a little at my words.

“Why?” she asked. She stopped on the last step.

“Um. Life?” I said. I could give exquisite detail. But I like to save sharing that sort of thing for cable news personalities.

- Writing style is fun, witty and readable
- Brynn's voice is strong
- Playful premise
- A handful of strong scenes

- Epistolary format not executed quite well enough to keep secondhand events emotional
- Emotional disconnection from characters besides Brynn
- No characters of colour
- Rushed, unsatisfying ending

Brynn Harper is a smart, witty junior lounging in her own apathy after a series of unkindnesses in her life: her brother's death, her unhappy household, the break-up with her girlfriend and the loss of her position at the school newspaper after the decline of her grades. Now she's doomed to the basement with the rest of the Applied kids. After she writes to Rachel Maddow for an English assignment, Brynn begins to confide in her hero through e-mails she never sends. Through unsent e-mails to Rachel, Brynn details her budding crush

on new student Michaela and the tentative interest in school politics she's forced into when cruel, spoiled Adam Graff runs for president of Student Government. **But: is it safe for Brynn to care about something again?**

I gotta admit, while I enjoy when books incorporate different formats, I wasn't a fan of an *entire* book of short, snarky, secondhand information. Brynn detailed a couple scenes pretty well, but there's not nearly as much as a firsthand scene would contain, and in most cases, the emotion was blunted, except for in a few dire moments. Brynn's relationship with Michaela suffered most as a result. Have you ever listened to your friend blabber about their crush? Yeah. That's the difference between reading a firsthand scene and reading Brynn's e-mails.

Brynn herself was likeable and sympathetic as a character, and the author's easy way with Brynn's voice transformed her sentences into things of beauty. **Brynn is a bitter, aching teen, and it comes through clearly and honestly.** She's a lonely, neglected child. My heart hurt for her as the losses started to add up again.

I do wish there was SOME actual representation in terms of characters of colour. I mean, Brynn, a young lesbian, juggling depression, grief, neglectful and abusive parents on top of a learning disorder? Excellent. Amazing. Funny, brilliant Lacey who uses a computer and speech board? Great! Tentative connections between drug use and neglectful or abusive parents. Very nice! But would it have hurt to mention a character specifically being not white? Michaela has coils of dark hair, which could indicate something, but, hey, I have coils of dark hair and I'm white as hell.

What really bothers me about Dear Rachel Maddow is how the author ends the book: it's rushed and unsatisfactory. The school election is ultimately a tool for Brynn's overarching character arc and her struggle against futility. Although the closure on both those points is rushed, it's the close of Brynn's character/emotional arc which irks me.

Warning: There be minor spoilers ahead.

(view spoiler)

It doesn't have to amount to anything. I doubt any of her parental figures would change. But that accountability *needs* to exist here.

Dear Rachel Maddow boasts a character with an excellent voice and hilarious prose, but the reliance on e-mail format hurts more than helps the narrative and the ending to the most compelling point of Brynn's story is rushed and highly unsatisfactory.

Ari says

(Originally posted on my blog at [WhatIsMuch!](#)!)

Thank you to NetGalley and Feiwel & Friends for the ARC to read and review!

Happy pride month, everyone! I definitely think it's fitting that the first book I finished reading this month was Dear Rachel Maddow— just the title alone should clue you in as to why!

However, that actually leads me into one of my favorite things about this book, so I suppose we can jump right in! I loved that the main character of Dear Rachel Maddow, 17 year old Brynn, was openly (except for to her family) lesbian, but this was not a coming out story. And of course, there is absolutely nothing wrong with coming out stories in YA! In fact, I feel that they're very important, since they give LGBTQIA+ youth who might be struggling with their own sexuality the opportunity to see a character go through the same struggles, and that can feel incredible. But sometimes that's just not the point of the story! Sometimes a character just is a lesbian, and it's not a big thing, and they get to be a character on their own merit. I really enjoyed and appreciated that, just like I really enjoyed how comfortable Brynn was with her sexuality, how much she owned being a girl who likes girls despite what anyone might think. It was like a little glimpse into how I wish Past Me could've been.

The first thing I mentioned about Brynn as a character was her being a lesbian, but honestly, Brynn was a very interesting character all around. She was a main character I had never seen before: a teenage lesbian who holds a fascination with (and a deep respect for) a famous political commentator and is in remedial classes due to her constant struggles with her schoolwork. Actually, Brynn uses her laptop as an assistive device, dictating all her emails and schoolwork as this helps her to process and work more efficiently. She struggles immensely with her grades, and genuinely considers dropping out of school once she turns 18. I loved seeing this in a book, as it made the character a lot more real and a lot more relatable.

The format of the story- written entirely in emails, mostly from Brynn to Rachel Maddow- was really interesting as well. It reminded me of books I used to read when I was younger, books written in journal/diary format. In fact, Dear Rachel Maddow and the writing style within reminded me a lot of Meg Cabot's writing in general (The Princess Diaries, All-American Girl). I really thought, too, that the idea of this teenage girl writing her journal (more or less) in the form of letters to someone she greatly admires was spot-on. When I was in high school, I did much of the same sort of thing! I would write letters in my journal to musicians I looked up to- sometimes it was just easier to talk "to" someone than attempt to get my thoughts out any other way, and in writing the letters addressed to someone I admired, I could imagine they were listening and caring about what I had to say, which was often a comfort when I needed it most, in its own way. Some people might think it's strange that Brynn spilled her whole life story to Rachel Maddow (though she doesn't actually send the emails; they sit in her drafts folder), but I understood completely. I will say one thing about the email format of this book, though, which is that it lent itself to a bit of a predictable twist, but to me that wasn't really a big deal.

The plot of Dear Rachel Maddow is where I start to have some issues with the book. On one hand, the plot as a whole was unique and refreshing, and I really appreciated that. I can't easily think of another YA book I've read with such a politics-driven plot. Although the politics in this book are student politics (student body president, that sort of thing), the story does seem to mirror real world politics, or at least, the politics and events surrounding the 2016 election. There was even a quote towards the end of the book that really struck me, not just because of what it was saying, but also because of the specific word choices used:

So often politics and power trump compassion and reason, right? Even you can't deny that.

Why can't Congress pass anything? Why do even the most horrible candidates rise to the top of the heap in real-world elections?

I'd like to make it clear that my issue with the plot is not because of the politics. I thought it was wonderful that Kisner created this parallel, but did so in such a subtle and powerful way. Though books can and should certainly be used for escapism, they also can and should be used to speak on important, and often difficult, topics. This was something I thought Kisner accomplished incredibly well, especially considering this is her debut novel.

However, I did feel that the plot read very young. Sometimes I forgot that Brynn was nearly an adult, and would be surprised all over again when she mentioned turning 18 soon. I can't quite put my finger on what it was about Dear Rachel Maddow that gave me this impression, either. It's not that Brynn was immature, per se. In fact, I actually found her to be rather mature in a lot of ways, which makes sense considering all the hardships she's already faced in her young life. I can't quite pin down what made me feel that this book read younger than intended, but you can also take me saying that with a grain of salt, considering I'm in my mid-twenties and younger readers might not feel the same way!

Speaking of the hardships Brynn has faced, while reading this book, I was reminded a lot of the last book I reviewed- you can see my review for The Brightsiders here. Brynn's mother and stepfather are certainly abusive, and that's a theme throughout the book. Again, the depictions of this abuse feel a little over the top, to the point that it seems a bit exaggerated. However, I started to realize a couple things as I read. One was that Dear Rachel Maddow is written as though Brynn is writing in her journal (albeit in the format of letters to Rachel Maddow, of course). Of course the abuse might seem exaggerated, in that case! She is often writing about events right after they've occurred, while the emotions are likely still fresh and raw. I know that for me, when something happens that hurts or upsets me and I try to write about it in my journal or vent to a friend, I often can end up exaggerating too- not intentionally, not to mislead anyone, but because my emotions are exposed and painful in those moments, and I am expressing them in the way that is best for me in that moment in order to process what has happened. I felt that maybe this was the case for Brynn, too.

But at the same time, I started to realize that perhaps my view on depictions of abuse in books, such as Dear Rachel Maddow or The Brightsiders, is flawed. In the aforementioned review, I stated that I felt the depiction of the abuse Emmy King endured was too extreme (although I clarified that the context of this extremity made sense with other issues I had with the book as a whole), but I also said that I was in no way trying to discredit the level of abuse anyone has gone through. I realized, while reading Dear Rachel Maddow, that this is flawed thinking on my end. Perhaps the reason I feel these depictions of abuse are so extreme is because I haven't endured those types of things personally, and as a result, reading about such abuse makes me uncomfortable. This is something I'll have to work on with myself when reading books in the future that depict abuse, and I certainly apologize that my views on the subject as depicted in these books very well might have invalidated some survivors' experiences.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed Dear Rachel Maddow, and would definitely recommend it to other readers. Though it was definitely heavy in parts, it was also funny and sweet and uplifting in others, and you can't help but root for Brynn throughout the entire story. I even found myself wondering what Brynn's future will hold for her, by the end, and wishing in a way that we could have a follow-up story about her! Best of all, today is this book's release date, so you don't even have to wait to pick up a copy if you're interested. I'd certainly recommend you do so!

4 stars

Note: the quote used in this review was pulled from the ARC and not a final copy

Ava says

Perfect for fans of NICE TRY, JANE SINNER, this is a YA novel about a lesbian girl that's told in a completely unconventional way: in emails written to political journalist Rachel Maddow. I read it a few months ago in one sitting because I just couldn't put it down.

Why should you pick up DEAR RACHEL MADDOW? I have 2 main reasons.

1. unique formatting

YA has been more creative lately with the formatting and style of books, and this is a great example of that. Because of the fact that it's told through (mostly unsent) emails, you get a really interesting look into the main character's head and unfiltered thoughts that really makes the book stand out.

2. excellent main character + representation

The main character of this book, Brynn, is lesbian, and I loved this representation. In the book, she fights to get non-Honors-class kids into her high school's leadership team so that they have a say in the school events. It shows teenagers that they're not lesser if they're not the top of the class academically. Brynn is funny and real, and is a character that many teenagers can identify with.

I hope this convinces you to go pick up DEAR RACHEL MADDOW. I promise you, it's worth it!

Susie Dumond says

When I was a closeted teenage lesbian, trying to figure out how to come out and what to do with my life, Rachel Maddow meant a lot to me. She was smart, and successful, and delightfully nerdy. She made me feel like it was ok to be passionate about things, like being politically engaged was cool. When I saw the description of Dear Rachel Maddow, it felt like the publisher was describing my past self. I had to check it out.

Brynn is a teenager who has had a rough few years. Her family has been through a tragedy that has left her reeling, her aggressive stepdad makes her home life challenging, her girlfriend broke up with her, and her previously impressive grades are slipping. After a school assignment leads Brynn to write an email to her celebrity hero, political commentator Rachel Maddow, Brynn finds her draft emails to Rachel serving as a kind of diary that allows her to further explore her interest in representative democracy and student government.

This book has a lot of heart. As a longtime fan of Rachel Maddow, I love how she's used as a vehicle for Brynn to explore her advocacy interests and embrace her inner nerd. Reading this would have meant a lot to me as a teen, to see that you don't have to be perfect to make a difference in your community, and that being

passionate about something is cool. The concept is very strong, and sometimes the writing doesn't quite live up to it, but it's certainly an entertaining and engaging read. I look forward to seeing what comes next from Adrienne Kisner.

Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for the ARC in exchange for my honest review.

Alexa says

DNF.

I couldn't get into this one and a bit more than halfway through I had to stop. I just couldn't connect with the story and there wasn't anything keeping me hooked to it. This book is about a girl, Brynn, who drafts emails to Rachel Maddow after choosing to email her as her someone that inspire's her or is her hero for a school assignment. After sending in her school assignment she continues drafting emails for I'm guessing therapeutic reasons. Instead of journaling, she drafts emails to a stranger.

Brynn has had a tough time, after the death of her brother she can't seem to care for her grades or if she'll even get into college. Her family life is also a tough one since her father left the family to start a new one and doesn't keep in touch and her mother married an awful person who basically doesn't want Brynn around.

Strangely, Brynn gets inspired to do something, to stand up for the student body and decides to run as a representative to voice what the students want and who the next superintendent will be.

This book is diverse, from what I read there's an LGBTQIA+ and a disability representation and, from what I read, I found those characters to be written realistically and organically throughout the story. However, I remember being more than a quarter way through and only then realizing that one of the characters had a disability. I'm aware some readers are annoyed when things are spelled out or over explained but I think as a reader I should be getting more of an explanation to picture what the character I'm reading looks like.

A copy of this book was provided to me by Raincoast Books for an honest review

Gary Anderson says

In Adrienne Kisner's debut novel *Dear Rachel Maddow*, high school isn't going particularly well for Brynn Harper. Her family barely exists and provides scant support. Her approach to academics has led to placement in the "Applied" track, and her Honors student girlfriend Sarah has dumped her. Then English teacher Mr. Grimm assigns his students to email a well-known person. Brynn chooses MSNBC political analyst Rachel Maddow.

Maddow graciously responds to Brynn's first email, and Brynn continues to write frequent "Dear Rachel Maddow" emails, although they remain unsent in her email's Drafts folder. Writing unsent emails to Rachel Maddow becomes Brynn's method of dealing with life's stresses, but it also gives Brynn a way to articulate her views on what goes on around her through a political lens. This is one of the beauties of *Dear Rachel Maddow*. Brynn Harper's high school becomes a microcosm of American life in the time of Trump where bullies blatantly bully, and thoughtful, brave people try to maintain a sense of humor while resisting

authoritarian policies and dogma.

Some resist on the down-low, but not Brynn. She has nothing to lose by bringing all the sass, and she isn't shy about speaking truth to power, whether it's her teacher, her principal, her mother, or bullies. *Dear Rachel Maddow* is the funniest YA book I've read in a long time. Of course, the humor may depend on whether a reader agrees with Brynn's political stance.

Although many of the YA tropes are here—popular kids vs. the others, a wicked step-parent, breaking up and finding new love—*Dear Rachel Maddow* feels fresh because of Brynn's voice, the email format, and an obvious connection to today's headlines. Another surprise I appreciate is that author Adrienne Kisner portrays teachers and administrators who are wise, passionate, and generous. Too many YA books unfairly demonize educators.

Every class has at least one reader who will love this book. Give it to readers who like Jennifer Mathieu's *Moxie*, and those left-leaners interested in journalism, politics ... and sass.

This review also appears on my What's Not Wrong? blog.

Jasmine says

If you're interested, you could check out the exclusive excerpt, which is an ADORABLENESS OVERLOAD for me, and an ARC giveaway for my friends in the U.S. [HERE!!!](#)

YA Wednesdays says

You can find the full review on [YAWednesdays.com](#).

I was really surprised by how much I enjoyed this book and was lucky enough to be featured on the blog tour, so I wrote Dear Rachel Maddow a letter, telling it how much I loved it--from the epistolary writing style to the LGBTQ+ rep, to grief, shitty parents, blended families, tough time at school--this contemporary had it all and really succeeded in gripping me in all of its characters and drama. Very highly recommended.

Find my review in its entirety [HERE](#).

Elise (TheBookishActress) says

pretty decent!!! **review to come!!**

not to make this weird but does Rachel Maddow know this book is being published is she proud

•kayla• says

I FEEL SO BAD FOR DNFING THIS BOOK BECAUSE ITS WONDERFUL BUT I'M IN A NON-CONTEMPORARY MOOD AT THE MOMENT SO I'M BARELY ABLE TO GET INTO IT.

I'LL PICK THIS BACK UP IN A FEW WEEKS. HOPEFULLY ?

Stacee says

I am a huge fan of books in epistolary format and I loved the synopsis of this one.

Brynn was a great MC. I enjoyed being in her head and reading her struggle was relatable. There's a pretty big group of characters here, but only a few really stood out to me. And someone really needs to junk punch her mom and her stepdad for just not caring. At all.

Plot wise, it took some time to settle in. I wasn't instantly captivated, but as soon as Brynn started to get worked up and active, I was drawn in. I loved how she had a group of people behind her and she didn't even realize it. I imagine a lot of people feel that way and it was handled well.

Overall, it was a quick and intriguing read. I loved the spin with the politics {something I would have never read or enjoyed until about 2 years ago} and I was rooting for Brynn. My only complaint is that I would have liked just a bit more at the end, but I was mostly satisfied.

Huge thanks to Feiwel and Friends for providing the arc free of charge

Biz (Formerly Rachael) says

*"Nevertheless, they persist.
I guess that means I fucking have to, too."*

This is bound to be my favorite contemporary of 2018. It's the perfect blend of emotion, humor, diversity, and political references. **Queer teens and teens with disabilities will be able to find characters like them in these pages.**

Dear Rachel Maddow tells the story of Brynn, a junior in High School. Brynn had a good life, but when her brother Nick died a year ago, her life started falling apart. Now she's on the "Applied" track at school, her first girlfriend has broken up with her, she's kicked off the school newspaper, and her abusive and manipulative parents are driving her up the wall. She's looking forward to turning eighteen when she can finally move out of her house and possibly drop out of high school. After being assigned to write to her personal hero, Rachel Maddow, for an assignment, and after being overjoyed at receiving a reply, Rachel begins to keep a journal of letters to Rachel about her struggles in High School journalism and politics that she never sends.

This book packs a **lot** of tough topics into under 300 pages, but **it never feels like too much to handle.** Not

only that, but the characters and writing just blend together with the plot so well that I'm not convinced that the author didn't **pluck this entire story out of a high schooler's mind**. All the characters are all so flawed and three-dimensional, and that's especially difficult to do when the book is told in journal format, so hats off to everyone who worked on this book.

Brynn, the narrator, was my favorite character. She's brash, unapologetic, funny, and just trying to get through life and maybe get a girlfriend along the way. **What a mood.** She hides her depression and her trauma in her online journal while putting on a smiling face (or, at least, a righteously angry one) for the people around her.

I really felt for Brynn throughout this entire book. The quote at the beginning of this review really does describe her, and even though she doesn't realize it, she's **amazing** at persisting and pushing herself through life. Her character arc, and how her mental health progresses throughout the book are both so realistic and stunning. So many moments in this story made me tear up – I don't know if it's just because so much of it was relatable or what, but I know that depressed teens, teens who struggle in school, and teens who've had to deal with trauma will be able to see themselves in Brynn.

And Brynn's reluctance to get into school politics, but completely owning it once she enters, is so iconic. She is an underdog who represents the other underdogs in her school, chosen to represent them and take down the elite and selfish honors students. This book also doesn't fall into the "popular kids are always evil" trope; Brynn gains more popularity as she goes on, especially with the "normal" people in her school (e.g. not the top 10% GPA ranking). I really rooted for her, and I know other readers will, too.

Another favorite character of mine was Lacey. Lacey is a peer mentor for Brynn and the other students on the "Applied" track, and is Brynn's best friend at school. She's also in a wheelchair and uses a keyboard to speak, but I love the fact that this book emphasizes that a person's disability isn't the most important thing about them. There's a hilarious quote from Lacey where she addresses people's ableism, saying,

"People call me 'brave' all the time, and it annoys me. As if my mere existence is some sort of war. It's not. I don't think I'm any braver than another person just trying to live life. I just can't do stairs."

The dry wit in this quote is the **same kind of humor** in the rest of the book, and that makes the voice of the novel refreshing and laugh-out-loud funny.

Brynn's romance with her love interest, Michaela, is so cute and funny. Though it's a little insta-lovey in the beginning, the way it develops is so realistic and cute after the fact that I don't mind it that much. Neither of them are perfect people, but Brynn's tendency to blurt whatever she's thinking around Michaela is so endearing and adorable.

The plot of *Dear Rachel Maddow* has a surprising amount of twists for a contemporary novel – I would compare it to a Shakespeare comedy, but more serious drama than just meaningless shenanigans.

I thought that the email/journal format actually really worked well for this novel. I'm always hesitant to read books that are solely told through journaling, because they tend to lead to less character development for everyone but the narrator, and provide a limited scope on the novel itself, but this book was a defiance to those assumptions. The journal format here is the way it should be done everywhere – with humor, some chapters in other people's lives, and personality.

Another important message in this book is that high school isn't everything. I don't just mean socially – this

book emphasizes that going to college, that being successful academically, isn't the best thing for everyone. **You're not any less valuable if you don't succeed in high school and don't go to college.** Just do what you care about and it'll all work out.

”There is no shame in work that doesn't require a college degree. I just want you to know you have options. You shouldn't give up a dream because other people make you feel like you aren't worth investing in yourself.”

Well, hot damn, Mr. Grimm, getting all deep and shit.”

The transition from seriousness to humor is PERFECTLY DONE. Throughout the entire book. It's incredible.

I hope to god that this book gets a lot of hype when it comes out – it so deserves it. Not only is it diverse, but the plot, characters, and writing are so so incredibly high-tier. I would recommend this for any contemporary fans, and even non-fans, especially those with disabilities, those in the LGBT community, or those who are looking for a funny, refreshing, realistic book that will make you feel **all the feels**.

”You know the Applied rooms you don't give a shit about? That's where all my fucks went to die. Goodbye fucks!”

Thanks to NetGalley for the eARC copy!

Ellen says

“Nevertheless, they persist.

I guess that means I fucking have to, too.”

Sixteen-year-old Brynn's life is a mess. Her beloved older brother Nick died of an overdose and her mother and step-father are so clueless that they punish Brynn for her academic decline and ignore her ongoing grief. When Brynn is given an assignment to write to a favorite celebrity, she chooses Rachel Maddow who is her current role model. In a series of unsent emails, Brynn tells Rachel about her girlfriend breaking up with her and all the other school and home drama that's bringing her down. Brynn's passion had been writing for the school newspaper, but she can't even do that again until she brings her grades back up. So when suspicion of arson is cast upon one of the top school athletes who bullies her the most, Brynn decides she can't stay on the sidelines and must act.

Adrienne Kisner's epistolary format allows the reader to feel Brynn's pain and watch as her growing sense of injustice transforms her from an outraged bystander to an involved citizen. Brynn doesn't necessarily want to get involved, but she gradually realizes that if she doesn't, no one else will.

I found myself cheering for Brynn as she came into her own. I believe teen readers who have been inspired by the #MeToo movement and the activism of the students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas HS may begin to see the possibilities for action in their own world. This book should appeal to fans of John Green and readers who enjoy a feel-good novel about a girl who just won't give up. This book drops a lot of f-bombs and deals with some pretty serious issues, so I suspect it will be most appreciated by older teens and their parents. Strongly recommended.

