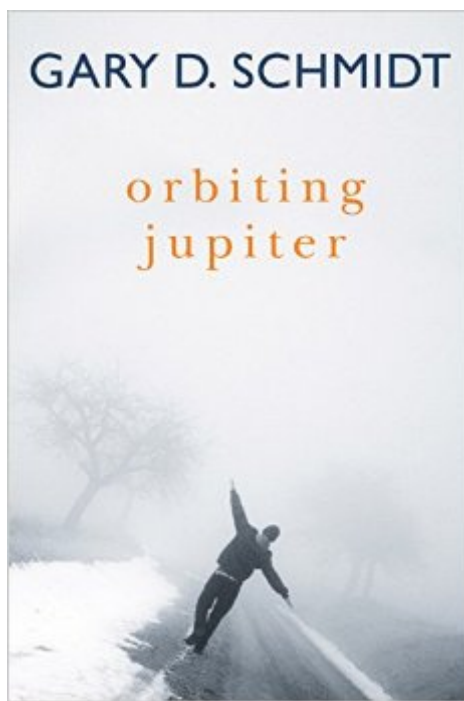


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# Orbiting Jupiter



## Synopsis

The two-time Newbery Honor winner Gary D. Schmidt delivers the shattering story of Joseph, a father at thirteen, who has never seen his daughter, Jupiter. After spending time in a juvenile facility, he's placed with a foster family on a farm in rural Maine. Here Joseph, damaged and withdrawn, meets twelve-year-old Jack, who narrates the account of the troubled, passionate teen who wants to find his baby at any cost. In this riveting novel, two boys discover the true meaning of family and the sacrifices it requires.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 740 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 192 pages

Publisher: Clarion Books (October 6, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 054446222X

ISBN-13: 978-0544462229

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.9 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (65 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,984 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Pregnancy](#) #2 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Orphans & Foster Homes](#) #3 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Dysfunctional Relationships](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

As we know from the product description, Jack's family has adopted Joseph who, at age 14 is already a father. He's also been in juvenile detention and, while under the influence of some unknown drug, tried to kill a teacher. He's rather twitchy, so don't stand behind him, don't touch him and be careful what you ask about. But life at the idyllic Hurd family organic farm seems to be doing Joseph some good. He does his chores without argument, especially milking Rosie who moos to say she loves him. Jack's parents seem to know just how to handle Joseph and he slowly loosens up and tells the story of his daughter and her mother. Some of Joseph's teachers at school - those who can get past their own preconceived biases - realize he's quite smart and talented. Maybe

there's even college in his future, whatever his abusive father might have to say about the matter. But there's still something missing in Joseph's life. Something big. A whole planet, in fact. Or, well, the child named for that planet. Joseph yearns to be united with his daughter and spends a great deal of his time and energy finding Jupiter. How far will Jack and his family go to help this fierce yet oddly tender foster child? I wanted to like this book. The characters are well drawn in sparse language that tells us just enough of what we need to know. Despite its heavy theme, the book is not maudlin or prurient. We develop a deep respect for Joseph and his foster family. But there are several things that interfered with my enjoyment - even my acceptance - of the book, especially the more I think about it after finishing it. For one thing, there is an assumption running through the book that Joseph has little or no legal right to his daughter because he himself is a minor. I'm not entirely sure what time frame this book is supposed to be set in, but there are a few references to cell phones, so I guess we are to assume it's relatively modern. But under modern law, there is no reason why Joseph wouldn't have full legal access to his daughter. The law makes no distinction based on the age of a parent, even if the parent is a minor. Parental rights are extremely strong in this country (although I admit I don't know Maine's laws specifically). It would have to be proven that Joseph is not a fit parent in order for him to lose his rights, he would not have to prove his fitness in order to gain his rights. And he could not be forced to sign away his rights while he's in juvenile detention - that would be considered duress, if not coercion or even blackmail considering the threats that are used to scare him into doing it (which such threats would probably carry no weight, as it is unlikely that any court would find consensual sex between minors of the same age to be rape). But the idea that either Joseph's father or the baby's mother's family would have more rights to Jupiter than Joseph himself is a little hard to believe, especially in this day and age when the father's rights movement has become so powerful. But we can set some of this aside as simply a literary vehicle to tell the story that Schmidt wants to tell. But then there's the ending. I suppose I should give a **\*\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*\***, even though I won't reveal exactly what the ending is, but it's difficult to review this book without at least talking in a round-about way about the ending. Suffice it to say that a major twist comes just when everything looks like it's going to work out. Think "My Sister's Keeper". It's the kind of ending that feels manipulative, if not even cruel. The kind of ending that will make you want to throw the book out the window. It's almost like Schmidt didn't know how to end the book without being sappy, so he took the easy way out instead. But then maybe he felt bad because he has to try to make it all okay again but only ends up feeling more contrived and manipulative. It's tough to write books about foster kids without becoming maudlin or prurient by wallowing in the details of the horrific lives many of them have led. I will give this book

credit for avoiding those pitfalls, but it still can't avoid the pitfall of being manipulative, jerking around our emotions for effect. Still and all, I think the target audience will enjoy reading the book. Just know what you're getting yourself into.

Gary D. Schmidt is able to capture the nuances of life so perfectly in just a few words. In *Orbiting Jupiter* he shares the heartbreak, the joys, and the personalities of humanity. More than anything, I read his books because they make me feel alive. For a brief time the successes, or setbacks, of Jack and his foster brother Joseph-- are mine. In every one of his books we find characters that we can relate to. Characters we despise and characters that are the heroes of this crazy world. Jack, even though he's only in the 6th grade, is someone I can look up to as he tries his best to do what he feels to be right and to unconditionally provide the support and "have Joseph's back" as Joseph tries to overcome the problems that life has beset him with and find his (Joseph's) daughter-- Jupiter. This book has both sad and happy moments, and while the overall tone might be considered by many to be dark I think the challenge is to find the happy things-- come what may. I would highly recommend this book to almost anyone. It's content, although certainly not graphic, alludes to very real problems that might be disturbing to very young readers (e.g., younger than 12) but I definitely think that it's worth the time it takes to read/listen to it. I don't want to leave any spoilers so this review is pretty much done.

After finishing this book last night, I'm still a bit perplexed about this story, and I am vacillating about my star rating. My indecision stems from parts of the story that I absolutely love, the target audience that I suspect this book is intended to reach, and an ending (no spoilers here) that was a mix of disappointment and understanding. If I could give half stars, I think I'd land it at 3.5 stars. Jack lives with his family on a farm in Maine, and take in foster boy Joseph, who comes from a hideous past. Joseph, at age of thirteen, became a father of baby Jupiter, and spends the story wrestling with this reality. Jack and his family provide a warm, understanding cocoon for Joseph as he adjusts to adults (and a special cow) who care for him. Most of his time is spent with foster brother Jack, as Jack tries to navigate the complex mental issues of Joseph with honesty and occasional rule violations. It's the relationship between the two boy that drives the story, at least it did for me. Jack counting Joseph's smiles was profoundly beautiful and innocent, and a sign of Joseph's thaw. Much like the beautiful way that Schmidt describes the winter-soaked Maine countryside, deep in snow, ice, and frozen wonder. He writes his outside as frosty as can be, making the inside of Jack's home and the barn warm, nurturing places they need to be. Yet, it's in the ending that I felt I got lost a bit,

and the narrative drive that kept me in the story got lost as well. Let's just say that I would have wanted a different ending. My disappointment with the ending doesn't mask the beauty of the story. This is not a story for elementary students. Schmidt's simplicity in the writing makes this a perfect story for middle schoolers who need an easier text to navigate, but not a "dumbing down" of the content. I could easily see what rich and insightful conversations this book will inspire in ELA classrooms across our middle schools. The title is *Orbiting Jupiter*, but for me, the true orbit is Jack and Joseph.

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