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## Book Review - Saving Ruth: A Novel

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## Off the SHELF

**Saving Ruth: A Novel** by Zoe Fishman (William Morrow Paperbacks, 2012: ISBN: 9780062059840, \$14.99)

Ruth Wasserman is a Jewish girl who returns to her southern Alabama home for the summer after completing her freshman year of college at the University of Michigan. Because of the regional differences in location, the novel first appears to be a contrast of southern and northern cultures, but when Ruth begins to internally express anxiety over how she looks, it becomes clear that this account is more about personal struggle. This internal conflict only intensifies when Ruth observes that everything about home has changed, including her brother's personality and her parents' relationship.

The story is told through Ruth's point of view, but there is more than one plot line occurring.

These simultaneous narratives are sometimes confusing, but at the same time reflect that life is not always painstakingly structured. Ruth's true thoughts are revealed only through inner dialogue because she is not emotionally capable of voicing them out loud. Because Ruth expresses her true feelings through inner dialogue, the story becomes more relatable to readers who clearly understand, if not identify with, her feelings

The description of the other family members' conflicts, however, is biased because the story is told in first person and is only revealed through Ruth's interactions with them. If the

story was written in third person, readers might gain more insight into a family who all endure the same stress of change. The author then could have elaborated on, instead of hinted at, how they endured in different ways. By limiting this perception to Ruth, however, the author discloses only cursory details to their conflicts which in turn provides for a tedious sequence of events with a lack of character development.

Despite these shortcomings, the author does well in portraying how Ruth and her family experience mutual struggles. They remain taciturn in dealing with these conflicts until a near disaster forces them to confront their feelings towards each other.

The climax of the story is unexpected and is somewhat disappointing. The author uses a near tragedy of a young child to interject clichés of the Deep South's racial segregation, and this does not add to the overall message of the story and so is

therefore unnecessary. Although the situation obviously places the story among typical southern culture, differences in race do not contribute in any way to how the author uses this situation to bring the Wasserman family together again.

Because the characters in the story are not fully developed, this novel may be more appropriate for a young readership instead of for the experienced adult who is looking for an insightful read.

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