



Venus out. Her patient dedication finally pays off when the girl shows an interest in She-Ra, Princess of Power comic books. From there, a story of domestic abuse, removal to foster care and a slow emergence from silent isolation unfolds. However, Venus is not the only fascinating character here. Hayden sets Venus's bittersweet and complex story against the backdrop of other students, including one boy with a very high IQ but behavioral problems, another with Tourette's syndrome and a girl who inexplicably spouts sophisticated poetry and talks to her hand. In this first-person narrative, Hayden also shares her own thoughts, worries and strained relationship with a mismatched classroom aide, creating a rich tapestry of the dynamics of a group of special needs youngsters and the adults who try to help them.

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**From School Library Journal** Adult/High School-A crisply analytical depiction of one year in a special education classroom. Hayden's approach is straightforward and heartwarmingly compassionate not only in its portrayal of the relationships she developed with her students, but also in its appraisal of a philosophical conflict with her teacher's aide and the effect this had on the functioning of the students. The challenge of creating a highly structured, safe, yet sensitive and supportive environment for five children between the ages of six and nine, all with multiple emotional and developmental handicaps, is a study in creativity, perseverance, and keen observation. The author vividly describes her early struggles to inspire bonding among her charges and incremental progress in leading them toward norms of social behavior. The book ultimately focuses on Venus, age seven, whose impoverished and abusive home life frames the backdrop upon which her steps toward trust are poignantly rendered. Twins Shane and Zane, affected by fetal alcohol syndrome; Jesse, afflicted with Tourette's syndrome; and brash and aggressive Billy certainly present a full spectrum of challenges, but it is with Venus that the teacher's most indomitable problem-solving skills are engaged. Insightful and eminently readable, this book will be of particular value to students with a career interest in special education, social services, or counseling.

*Lynn Nutwell, Fairfax City Regional Library, VA*

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