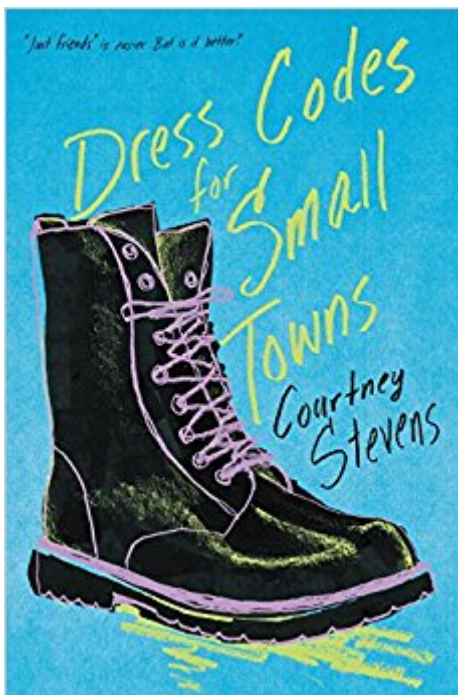


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Dress Codes For Small Towns



Synopsis

"A poetic love letter to the complexities of teenage identity, and the frustrations of growing up in a place where everything fits in a box—except you."—David Arnold, New York Times bestselling author of *Kids of Appetite* "Courtney Stevens firmly reasserts herself as a master storyteller of young adult fiction; crafting stories bursting with humor, heart, and the deepest sort of empathy."—Jeff Zentner, 2017 Morris Award Winner for *The Serpent King* "Courtney Stevens carries us into the best kind of mess: deep friendships, small town Southern gossip, unexpected garage art, and unfolding romantic identity."—Jaye Robin Brown, author of *Georgia Peaches and Other Forbidden Fruit* As the tomboy daughter of the town's preacher, Billie McCaffrey has always struggled with fitting the mold of what everyone says she should be. She'd rather wear sweats, build furniture, and get into trouble with her solid group of friends: Woods, Mash, Davey, Fifty, and Janie Lee. But when Janie Lee confesses to Billie that she's in love with Woods, Billie's filled with a nagging sadness as she realizes that she is also in love with Woods—and maybe with Janie Lee, too. Always considered "one of the guys," Billie doesn't want anyone slapping a label on her sexuality before she can understand it herself. So she keeps her conflicting feelings to herself, for fear of ruining the group dynamic. Except it's not just about keeping the peace, it's about understanding love on her terms—this thing that has always been defined as a boy and a girl falling in love and living happily ever after. For Billie—a box-defying dynamo—it's not that simple. Readers will be drawn to Billie as she comes to terms with the gray areas of love, gender, and friendship, in this John Hughes-esque exploration of sexual fluidity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“No one writes family and heart and the South like Courtney Stevens. *Dress Codes for Small Towns* is a poetic love letter to the complexities of teenage identity, and the frustrations of growing up in a place where everything fits in a box—except you. This book cannot be contained.” (David Arnold, New York Times bestselling author of *Kids of Appetite*)

“Courtney Stevens has outdone herself capturing the complicated love of family, the sustaining love of friendship, and the most difficult love of all: the ability to love yourself for who you are. I dare you not to love this book.” (Stephanie Appell, Manager of Books for Young Readers, Parnassus Books)

“Courtney Stevens carries us into the best kind of mess: deep friendships, small town Southern gossip, unexpected garage art, and unfolding romantic identity. When I finished *Dress Codes for Small Towns*, you could hear my smile squeak from way across the room.” (Jaye Robin Brown, author of *Georgia Peaches and Other Forbidden Fruit*)

“Courtney Stevens delivers a cherished gift for our middle grades and high school readers. The gift of friendship. The gift of safe places. The gift of love. And, most importantly, the gift of acceptance.” (Julie R. Stokes, Literacy Coordinator, Dalton Middle School)

“With *Dress Codes for Small Towns*, Courtney Stevens firmly reasserts herself as a master storyteller of young adult fiction; crafting stories bursting with humor, heart, and the deepest sort of empathy.” (Jeff Zentner, Morris Award Finalist for *The Serpent King*)

“Will be highly recommending!” (Teresa Steele of Old Firehouse Books (Fort Collins, CO))

“With singing prose and a rollicking plot, Stevens presents a rich palette of characters daring to brave familial and societal expectations to become what they’re meant to be. A spirited, timeless tale of teen self-discovery in those tense, formative high school moments, captured with grace, lyricism, and insight.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

“Stevens moves the narrative beyond small-town drama by building in-depth characters; examining boundaries between friendship and romance, and different generational approaches to religion; and confronting gender and sexual assumptions head-on. [A] beautifully written exploration of human connection, self-discovery, and living to the fullest.” (Booklist (starred review))

“An instant classic. This is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* without the angst, for a new generation. A good choice for every collection.” (School Library Journal)

“Small-town hijinks and the true-to-life interconnectedness of the characters bring warmth and humor to Stevens’s

bighearted contemplation of love, family, and home. (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) “Stevens shows the courage it often takes to find oneself and then to be true to that. This story could contribute to open discussions about gender and sexuality.” (Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA))

Courtney Stevens knows her way around words like she knows her way around souls. I wanted to stop and highlight so many beautiful sentiments, observations, descriptions, bits of dialogue, but I didn't want to stop reading. The Hexagon of teen characters was so empathetically portrayed in all their similarities and differences that they became real people I just haven't met yet. I imagine that Courtney knows what each of them carries in their pockets, which is their favorite pair of socks, and the dream they had last night--deep knowledge. As an older reader well out of my teens I appreciated the depictions of less than perfect but well-meaning, loving, and sometimes baffled parents. No easy-out of sending kids to boarding school--these kids have families, context, history. Of course, that's all about the vehicle. The story itself is a beautiful coming of age at a phase of life where there are far more questions than answers (does that ever end?) and the struggle to define oneself in the midst of history and expectations and assumptions is fully explored. I love and unconditionally recommend this book.

Courtney Stevens has a way of making you fall hard for her characters and Dress Codes is no exception. I'm now madly in love with 6 small town teenagers and their dreaming and scheming ways. Stevens is able to take an issue like sexuality and not allow you to comfortably land on one side of a fence or another; she forces you, through deeply real characters, to hold the tension of a very complex part of our humanity. Life is not black or white and Stevens will open you up to that reality through this compelling story of love beyond labels.

4.5 Have you ever read a book that's truly managed to surprise you? A book that you went into thinking okay I'll probably like this but ended up absolutely loving it - so much so in fact that you now have a new favorite character? That's how Courtney Stevens' Dress Codes for Small Towns was for me. When I first started it, I wasn't sure if I was going to love it or hate it - it was different from my usual read but there was something that drew me to it. As it turns out, the more I read and the more I got to know Billie, our brazen, hilarious, and humble protagonist, the more I loved it. Simply put, Dress Codes for Small Towns is a complete and utter gem! Dress Codes for Small Towns begins the story of Billie McCaffrey. Much to her town's utter dismay, Billie has never fit the stereotype of a

preacher's daughter. Replacing dresses with boots and jeans, a gaggle of girlfriends with a loudmouthed, reckless boys, and shopping and tea parties with starting fires and accepting and giving dares, Billie has become the town's tomboy as well as the odd one out. However, with a friends as great as her "hexagon" and mostly forgiving, understanding parents, Billie is completely okay with this. Everything changes, though, the moments the Hexagon catches the youth room on fire. Suddenly, the town isn't okay with Billie's actions, and they aren't keeping their mouths shut about it. With Billie's father's job at risk, Billie knows she has to do something, and that something may just be rescuing the the Harvest Festival from ruin. Billie and the hexagon quickly hatch a plan, but the more the plan develops, the more Billie begins to have other dilemmas, especially regarding her complicated feelings towards her two best friends, Woods and Janie...and that's not even counting in Davey, the new boy in town. The one thing Billie does know? It's about to be one crazy month.

Billie is an amazing main character. She is fearless and strong. She is loving and loyal. She is an amazing friend and an even better partner-in-crime...basically, if Billie was a real person, I would definitely want her on my side!

From the first page, I loved her tell-it-like-it-is attitude. Billie's not afraid to speak her mind, and while that does get her in a fair amount of trouble at times, it doesn't mean she's afraid to do what she think is right.

At its core *Dress Codes for Small Towns* is about two things: friendship and finding yourself, no matter how messy and confusing the road may be. I feel like books about friendship is rarely found in YA, and honestly, I don't know why that's the case. The friendships I had in high school were incredibly important to me and monumental to who I am today, so to see a book featuring a group of best friends like the Hexagon made me happy - so incredibly happy. I loved seeing how their dynamic worked. I especially enjoyed how each member brought something important to the table - no member was the same. More importantly, how each pushed the others to be the best person they could be, even if they did so in a rash manner at times.

As for finding yourself, a large portion of this book focus on Billie finding herself, especially in regards to her sexuality. I found it interesting to see Billie start the book not knowing who she actually liked - Woods, Janie Lee, or Davy. Over the course of the book, she tries out each option and soon discovers the good and bad to every possible relationship. Courtney did a fantastic job of presenting Billie's confusion over this, and I feel that anyone who's every been in Billie's shoes will be able to relate.

The writing in this was also on point. I liked the way Courtney divvied up the book, including looks at the past as well as the current time. I also enjoyed how she gave Davey a POV. It added greatly to the story and also made me come to love and understand him even more than I already did. The aspect I found interesting about the writing, however, was the fact that you could only read so much at a time...I'm usually a speed reader, but this was one book I took my time with,

so much so it took me nearly four days to finish it. So my advice? Take your time with this one, it's well worth it in the end. In all, *Dress Codes for Small Towns* is about friendship, growing up, making the right decisions along with the wrong decisions. Most importantly, it's about being yourself, no matter the constraints the people around you set. Billie McCaffrey is a kick a\$\$ character - an inspiration for all. You'll fall in love with her voice, her friends, and her passions... I promise you that. Grade: A

Rating: 4.5 stars This was such a special book. I felt a wonderful range of emotions as I read this book, and I felt so many more feels than I expected. This book started off with a prank gone wrong, and then a great loss. So I was laughing and then totally subdued right away, and that roller coaster of emotions continued throughout. There were highs and lows, I laughed and cried, and I sort of loved every second of it. A really special part of this book was the Hexagon, that's what Billie called her group of friends. They were an interesting and diverse group with a fabulous dynamic. I loved when all six interacted together, but I also liked when Billie interacted with the members one-on-one. The most stellar interactions for me, were between Billie and Davey. Davey was the newest member of the Hexagon, and he had his own baggage to deal with, but when he finally started opening up to Billie, we got to see what a beautiful human he was. He had so much depth and just won my heart. He was supportive and selfless. He ignored his own desires and encouraged Billie to follow her heart and take time to figure herself out. He was a sweet, precious marshmallow. "The year I was seventeen, I have five best friends - a pixie, a president, a pretender, a puker, and a douchebag - and I was in love with them all for different reasons." Billie was sort of phenomenal too. She was so complex and multifaceted. She had such an intriguing and authentic voice. I really liked being in her head, and seeing her through her struggles. She set off to figure out her sexuality, but she really found out a lot more about herself and others along the way. There were some awesome things Stevens did in the story, which just took it to the next level and made it so special. There was this surprise towards the end, and I thought it was brilliant, because it solidified the idea that we shouldn't be too quick to pass judgements. We may be surprised by others and ourselves, sometimes. There was something Billie did throughout the book. She would write epitaphs for tombstone in her head. This one was my favorite, and really summed up Billie for me: "Billie McCaffrey, born 1999 - d. never. IN LOVING MEMORY: She can't be contained." I adored Otters Holt. Stevens constructed such a quaint little town. She revealed its physical beauty to us, as well as the colorful characters who inhabited the town. We learned of the town's history and traditions, and I can admit to loving it. As with anything that seems too good to be true, the town had some

negative qualities too, and Stevens did not shy away from them. I loved learning about Otters Holt, because understanding where Billie was from helped me understand her better. A big part of this book, is Billie struggling with her identity, with sexuality playing a big role. I felt the topic was approached from all sides and it felt really honest to me. I have to admit, I feel like we put too many labels on things and people, and I found it refreshing that Billie was left without one. I constantly question the need to do so, and I was sort of thrilled with the way Stevens left that. No boxes, no labels, just Billie. I think I might actually love that. So, if you know me, you may be able to guess why 4.5 and not 5 stars - the ending. We were lucky to get an epilogue, but I needed more closure than it provided. It's just who I am, a totally needy reader. It didn't diminish the overall wonderful feeling I had when I finished this book, because my heart was quite full. However, my head wanted a few answers, and though I think I understand why Stevens made that choice, I still wanted more. This is my first book by Stevens, and I found her writing to be something special. When I first started reading, there was something captivating in the rhythm that just pulled me in, and the nuggets! There are so many brilliant nuggets of wisdom and lovely quotes. I was highlighting like a fiend. Some lovely examples: "Death can muddle beliefs and raise questions, but it makes love crystal clear." "We carry it. It carries us. The real weight is carrying each other." "Here, Davey's a watercolor with smeared edges and paint running down the page. Loose. At home, he's a pencil drawing. I like this Davey better." "Jealousy might be a shallow well, but I bend my face to it all the same and take a drink." "Brother Scott taught me that even if people are boxes, they are boxes on a Rubik's Cube that shift. One turn, one conversation, one thought - all shift the cube." "Mom and I, well, we exist in much more incorporeal space. I don't measure her love in hours spent with me. I measure it in hours spent understanding me." "Most people want puddles to splash around in; Thom wants souls where scuba diving is encouraged." "And at the end of it, I am a dandelion, and Davey is a gale-force wind. He scatters me everywhere." Overall: a wonderful and heartfelt tale of finding one's identity. It's a story of friendship and love, devotion and dedication. I laughed, I cried, I even swooned a few times. A thoroughly satisfying reading experience.

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