

(your name) Judith Parker

(the date) June 4, 2006

Middle School Murders by Emily Marston

(the title and the author)

(The first paragraph -- General statements: what kind of book, when is it set, etc. Is it a modern novel; is it science fiction set in the 22nd century; is it an account of something that really happened in the 1800's; is it a timeless fantasy?)

Middle School Murders is a contemporary mystery set in a private school in Philadelphia in 2006 or 2007. Ms. Marston describes a series of scary murders that take place in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in a small school in Center City Philadelphia. We get to know this middle school; the bustling activity in the classroom, the sense of competition on the sports field, and the pressure of academic achievement. Is it possible that this community of learners is also a hotbed of intrigue? It is a fast-paced book, and Ms. Marston keeps the reader guessing about the identity of the murderer until the very last page.

(The second paragraph -- Statements about the plot. Do NOT retell the story but do give a general idea of the story, what happens, etc.)

In *Middle School Murders*, we read about what happens to students and teachers under severe stress. Hard as it is to believe, some students do not complete all their assignments on time. First one of these terrible students is found a bloody, battered pulp in the play yard. Did he really fall from the roof of the new gym, or was he pushed? Next, another student is found in the lab area, dead from an overdose of toxic fumes from a chemistry experiment. Did she misread the directions, or was she poisoned? Then a third student is electrocuted while trying to turn on a computer. Needless to say, the parents become worried and pressure the principal to put an end to these "accidents."

(The third paragraph -- Characters: what sorts of people do we meet? What about them rings true?)

Ms. Marston describes the murdered students carefully. The reader gets a vivid picture of these terrible individuals who do not do their homework on time. They are clearly careless slobs who could have killed themselves. However, they also are the types who irritate good teachers. Ms. Marston makes the reader like the teachers. There is the fair-haired, engaging science teacher who loves to see her students learn. Could she kill a lazy student? There is the caring math teacher who is always willing to go the extra mile to help

students learn. Did the extra mile include the murder of someone who didn't want to learn? What about the young teacher who tries so hard to help students complete the best possible projects? Could that include eliminating a student who simply doesn't care? Then there is the language arts teacher who has read so many books. Did one of those books include techniques for murdering students who won't take the trouble to read?

(The fourth paragraph -- Author's style, commendations and recommendations. What did the author do best? Was there any part of the book that did not seem successful? Who would enjoy this book?)

Ms. Marston has a wonderful, humorous style. She makes the reader feel as if she really had spent a long time in a middle school and actually knew the students and the teachers there. However, I personally found the ending somewhat dissatisfying because I didn't believe that the principal would have been able to discover the amazing cause of the students' deaths. Otherwise, I thought this was an excellent book that anyone who has ever been to school would enjoy thoroughly. I also think Ms. Marston is particularly skillful at building suspense. I can't wait to read her newest book, *Moving-Up Day Massacre*.