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# Fish in the Sky

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Editorial Choice:

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Media type:

Book

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Josh Stephenson is coming up to 13, with puberty about to strike. Indeed, those first disconcerting hairs appear (?tiny like flies? feet?) before many chapters have elapsed. What?s more, there are ?many issues such as single parenthood, absentee fathers, truancy and bullying?. First love, porno magazines, religious doubts and suicidal thoughts are also in there for good measure. Too many issues, too much overt adolescent angst, can make for tedious reading, with too little shown and too much discussed.

Fridrik Erlings is a multi-award-winning novelist and poet from Iceland. Josh is depicted living with his mum, missing his dad, finding school embarrassing, falling for a girl he dare not speak to, putting up with the arrival in his home ? and even his bedroom ? of a 17-year-old female cousin. And, on top of all this, the appearance of those tiny hairs. No melodramatic incidents, though. Josh is a sensitive, likeable lad grappling with unfathomable feelings which adult readers may recall all too readily. Early adolescent readers, however, accustomed to the fast-talking, fast-moving, streetwise YA novels on UK bookshop shelves, might well lose patience with the reflective exploration of Josh?s thoughts. They may also be confused. Just where is this novel set? In a fishing port, certainly, but it?s never located and it doesn?t feel like a British port, though it does feel like Reykjavik. Although names seem to have been anglicised (no \_\_\_ *dottirs* here), the cultural context ? even the way of thinking ? feels *other*. Josh?s secondary school has features unlike those of any British comp. Even the translation wavers ? a native English-speaking desk editor might have warned Erling against such words as ?manifold?, for example.

And yet? beneath the Cool, beneath the self-absorbed concern for image exemplified by the Bebo/MySpace pages, there will be readers, especially boys, making their uncertain, private ways through early adolescence who could well find themselves in Josh. If they can see beyond the otherness of the setting and the occasional flights of uneasy language, they might discover the empathy and insights which the back cover predicts.

Running Order:

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