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# Tricks



## Synopsis

“When all choice is taken from you, life becomes a game of survival.” • Five teenagers from different parts of the country. Three girls. Two guys. Four straight. One gay. Some rich. Some poor. Some from great families. Some with no one at all. All living their lives as best they can, but all searching . . . for freedom, safety, community, family, love. What they don’t expect, though, is all that can happen when those powerful little words, “I love you,” are said for all the wrong reasons. These are five moving stories that remain separate at first, then weave together to tell a larger, more powerful story—a story about making choices, taking leaps of faith, falling down, and growing up. And figuring out what sex and love are all about. TRICKS is informed and inspired by living near Las Vegas—a big teen prostitution scene—and by the fact that teen prostitution is not exclusively the result of kids running away from abuse. Kids from “better” families are selling themselves for hefty sums in order to finance addictions or even just to buy jewelry or clothing. In some cases, parents prostitute their children for the same reason. So what happens to the kids who are asking themselves, and asking us, “Can I ever feel OK about myself?” • Highly charged, TRICKS is a gripping experience that turns you on and repels you at the same time.

## Book Information

Paperback: 656 pages

Publisher: Margaret K. McElderry Books (December 6, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1416950087

ISBN-13: 978-1416950080

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1.8 x 7 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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## Customer Reviews

I just finished the book, and I have to admit that I desperately flipped through the last few blank pages hoping to find more. I warn you all now, the latter half of this review may end up with spoilers. If it does, I’ll let you know with asterisks and pretty little caps. First of all, I’m not an experienced

Hopkins reader. I read another one of her books from my library (I'm pretty sure it was *Impulse?* Staring Tony, and two others in a suicide rehab clinic) So going in to *Tricks* I sort of knew what to expect. Gritty, honest writing, emotion, and heartbreak. Lots of people complain about two things in this book. One, universal with Hopkins it seems, is the writing style. I will admit I was also victim to the old mistake of opening it up, assuming it was poetry, and putting it down. Please, if you pick this book up, give it a chance! It's written in verse, but outside the "A Poem By \_\_\_\_" openers it's all straight prose divided in crafty line breaks that drive subtle points home. Another thing is that people complain it's just too graphic. I'm sorry, but you're reading about love, heartbreak, and eventual prostitution. People say it's too detailed, and it disturbs them. Imagine how the ones who LIVE this kind of thing feel. When you're being raped there is no neat way to avoid the gritty truth and details. There's no way to forget the smell of sex or scrape away enough skin in the shower to ever feel clean. Hopkins takes that feeling of desperation, fear, and the thoughts of "who will want me now" and instills this into her book. So if you don't want to feel like someone's gripping your heart with cold fingers, don't read this. If you're light stomached or can't take the truth of what's really happening in this world, this book isn't for you.

Generally, I only post reviews when I can give a book a 4 or 5 star rating. But for this one, because it has so many 5 star ratings, I wanted to throw my opinion out there for consideration. Ellen Hopkins is an author I like. Not only do I like her writing style, but I also appreciate the issues she addresses in her fiction. Being a high school teacher who has taught in areas with high "at-risk" populations, I believe that Ellen Hopkins is an important YA author. The topic of *Tricks* is timely and relevant.... I have no problem with that. What bothers me with this novel is the lack of character development. I didn't feel an attachment to a single character in the book. With few exceptions, there was almost nothing about any of the characters that I could grasp onto that went any deeper than the surface of the personality. What good does it do to describe the sexual violence when the characters don't come off as anything more than "paper people?" In "real" life, even when those teens who have been abused in ways similar to these teens, there is still a longing for beauty and creativity and knowledge.... even in the depths of despair, there is still a desire for music or writing or connections to knowledge. But the teens in *Tricks* didn't have that. These kids seemed to be driven by sex, drugs, gambling and the pursuit of relationships but nothing else. I wanted to know these characters. I had no idea who they were, just what they did, not why or how. I wanted to understand why a person would betray her beloved for 2 strawberries (not to mention betraying her own potential values concerning sex)..... Hopkins didn't convince me... nor did she convince me that

these kids had any depth to them at all.

"Tricks" was my second Hopkins' book. I read "Impulse" a while ago and remember devouring it in a matter of hours and loving it. I wish I felt the same way about "Tricks." Hopkins has established herself as a crusader of tough teen issues - drug use, suicide, abuse. This book was no exception. The author approached teen prostitution head-on, not sugar-coating it and without unnecessary moralizing. I applaud Hopkins for that, not many authors have guts to touch this kind of subject. As for the novel itself, it left me cold. First, I was (to my own surprise) extremely bored by the narration, so much so that I started contemplating to drop the book altogether. I might have felt this way because of the multitude of the POVs - too many switches, too little time to get attached to any character. Very often I found myself confused who was the narrator, the stories started to blend together. I also thought the book was just too wordy, too drawn out when it didn't need to be (too much info about Cody's gambling problems, for instance) and too quick or superficial when some events needed to be explored deeper. I felt I needed more to understand what drove Eden to so easily give herself over to Jerome for a couple of strawberries or how Ginger took on stripping. Some events in the book felt a bit too cliché or gimmicky - Lucas' reasons for breaking up with Whitney (because she was a virgin and not great in bed - really?) or Carl's transformation to an abusive sugar daddy in a matter of... minutes. Long story short, too often I felt I was being emotionally manipulated rather than truly touched by the characters' plight. I read another "issue book" not so long ago - "Living Dead Girl.

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