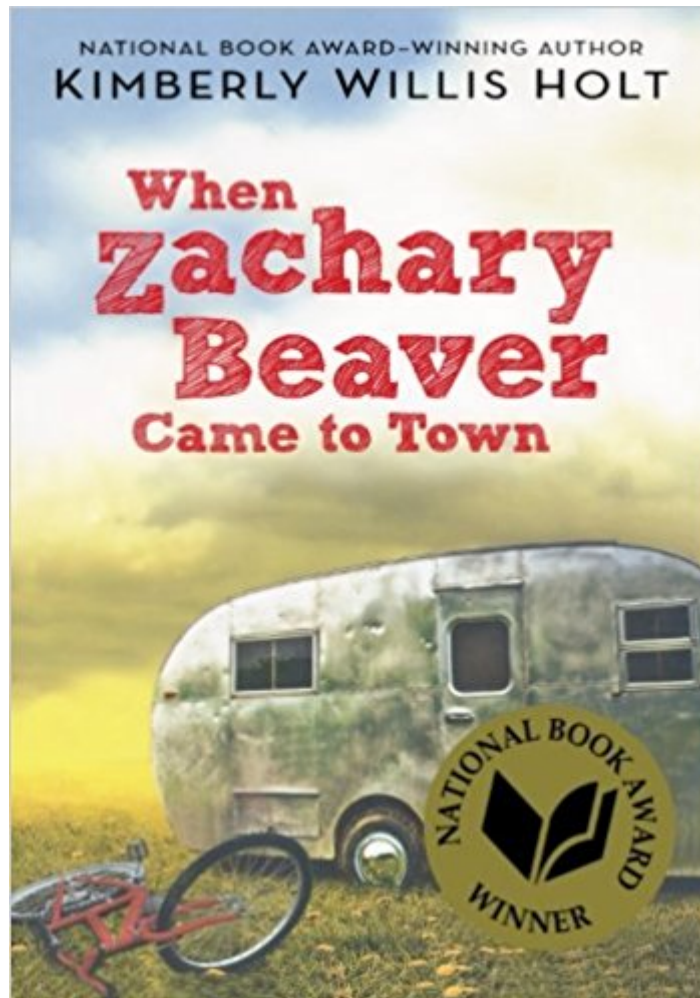


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# When Zachary Beaver Came To Town



## Synopsis

The red words painted on the trailer caused quite a buzz around town and before an hour was up, half of Antler was standing in line with two dollars clutched in hand to see the fattest boy in the world. Toby Wilson is having the toughest summer of his life. It's the summer his mother leaves for good; the summer his best friend's brother returns from Vietnam in a coffin. And the summer that Zachary Beaver, the fattest boy in the world, arrives in their sleepy Texas town. While it's a summer filled with heartache of every kind, it's also a summer of new friendships gained and old friendships renewed. And it's Zachary Beaver who turns the town of Antler upside down and leaves everyone, especially Toby, changed forever. With understated elegance, Kimberly Willis Holt tells a compelling coming-of-age story about a thirteen-year-old boy struggling to find himself in an imperfect world. At turns passionate and humorous, this extraordinary novel deals sensitively and candidly with obesity, war, and the true power of friendship. *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* is the winner of the 1999 National Book Award for Young People's Literature. This title has Common Core connections.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 4 - 9

## Customer Reviews

*Zachary Beaver* is a novel of many charms, not the least of which is Ms. Holt's penchant and skill at characterization of quirky small-town America. Her adult characters, especially, ring true with the foibles and idiosyncracies that we all have. Holt does this as well as Carson McCullers did. However, *Zachary Beaver* is less successful the younger the characters get, especially on an

emotional level, which should never happen with a novel for young adults. An example? Young Toby's mother sends word that she's not coming home from Nashville. Any 13 year old would be emotionally devastated. Toby is barely budged. Similarly, when his best friend's older brother dies in Vietnam. Should be devastating, does not play that way. Add to this the book's fairly predictable plot and leisurely pacing, and you have a book that many middle and high school kids are going to get assigned but not be aching to finish. Of those who say this is a better novel for adults, this reader agrees.

There is no room to doubt that this book more than deserved the 1999 National Book Award. Holt's quirky but lovable characters and beautiful imagery make this a book not quickly forgotten. This book is about friendship, loss, life, love and everything that connects them. For adults who revelled in Billie Letts' *WHERE THE HEART IS*, this book rings with the same poignancy and life-affirming spirit.

I just finished reading this book minutes ago and I am so moved and touched that I had to write in. Holt's writing is simple and cinematic. Her characters will stay with me for a long time. I was hesitant at first to read a book just about a fat boy who is ridiculed and objectified, but this book is so much more. The sub plots of Cal and his brother brought me to tears. I want to start reading it all over again.

I was quite taken in by this book for many reasons. But I know what the main one was. Without a doubt, this book has one of the clearest settings I have ever encountered. By the end of the first chapter, Antler, Texas is a town alive and throbbing with real characters and the sticky heat of the summer of 1971. All the characters come into focus, but none more so than Toby, the narrator. Perhaps no tale is more told in literature than the "coming-of-age" standard, but Holt pulls Toby's summer off with grace, humor, pathos, and honesty. Is this a children's book? Yea, and a darn fine one at that. But it's also more. It's about wars and mothers and dreams and tiny towns and big boys. Do not miss this place and this book!

I heard this book won a big award today so I went right to the library and read it! I think it is very well written. However, I found myself very far ahead of the story, so that I was not rushing to find out what happened next because I had already guessed what would happen next. I actually put it down to go read a magazine! I think this is a book that adults may like more kids in middle school like me. Oh

well. But the writing was still good.

When the fattest boy in American rides into the small town of Antler, Texas, the effect is anything but small. Zachary Beaver arrives in a small trailer, decorated with Christmas lights. The trailer ends up in the town's Dairy Maid parking lot. Admission is \$2.00 to take a look at 600 pound Zachary. Toby and his friend Cal join the long line for the brief glimpse. It is a summer of change. Toby's mother leaves her family behind for a western music career. Toby's best friend's brother is fighting in Vietnam. Toby himself is in love with Scarlett, who in turn loves an older and more suave Juan. And Toby lives in one of the more boring small towns of Texas, where nothing ever happens, until Zachary Beaver comes to town. "The cramped trailer smells like pine-Sol and lemon Pledge, and it's dark except for a lamp and sunlight slipping between the crack in the curtains. A drape hangs at one end, hiding the space behind it. And in the middle of the trailer sits the largest human being I've ever seen. When Zachary is deserted by his legal guardian, who takes off to find an additional side-show act, Toby and Cal begin leaving food and gifts on Zachary's doorstep. They hear Zachary's made-up stories of seeing the Eiffel Tower and the Seattle Space Needle. They learn that Zachary's mother died, and that Zachary was never baptized. Tender and memorable scenes include Toby and Cal building a set of steps to get Zachary into a truck to see a drive-in movie, and the efforts made to help Zachary be baptized, away from a side-show crowd at a nearby lake. The small town setting allows the larger and more important themes of love, friendship, loneliness, despair, hope and fulfilled dreams, to take their rightful place in this memorable coming-of age story. Winner of the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, "When Zachary Beaver Came to Town" is not to be missed.

I read this and loved it! I must admit that I am a big reader, and enjoy reading much more than other people my age. (Which, by the way, is 14) But still, I REALLY enjoyed this book. If you are thinking of buying this for a gift, aim for the 9-12 and 18 and older female age group, and the 9-11 and and fatherly or sensitive older males. My final opinion is I think it has good characters, a good setting, and a GREAT story.

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