



The Girl in the Walls

By Meg Eden Kuyatt

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The Story

After a hard school year, V has been sent to her Grandma Jojo's house for the summer in order to get away from it all. But unlike neurodivergent, artistic, sock-collecting V, Jojo is uptight, critical, and obsessed with her spotless house. She doesn't get V at all. V is sure she's doomed to have the worst summer ever.

Then V starts hearing noises from inside the walls of the house. Knocks, the sounds of a girl crying, and voices echoing in the night . . .

When V finds a ghostly girl hiding in the walls, they seem to have an immediate connection. This might be V's chance to get back at her perfect grandmother by messing with her just a little bit.

But the buried secrets go much deeper—and are much more dangerous—than V even suspects. And they threaten to swallow her and her family whole if she can't find a way to uncover the truth of the girl before it's too late.

A contemporary novel-in-verse with a ghostly twist by the author of *Good Different*, this book is about the power—and danger—of secrets.

Reading Group Questions

1. Did one of the poems in this book in particular stand out to you? Which one and why?
2. If you had a ghost, what would it look like? What would it feel? What would it say? Write about or draw your ghost.
3. While V and Jojo have lots of differences, what are some ways that they are similar?
4. V's mom says feelings are unreliable narrators. V's good art teacher says feelings are important warning signs to pay attention to. Do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? Why?
5. Which character(s) do you relate to most strongly, and why?
6. Can you think of a time when you felt really, really angry like V and Cat? Try some of these helpful techniques to use and process anger: Journaling, deep breathing, mindfulness techniques, and physical movement that brings joy. Which of these feels most helpful for you?
7. Is there a particular family member who is blamed for the problems in V's family? What is the impact of blaming one person for a whole family's problems? What might be a better way for V's family to address the situation?
8. How do each of the characters manage their feelings? What do you think about these approaches and their results?

About the Author



Photo © Vincent Kuyatt

Meg Eden Kuyatt is a neurodivergent author of books, including the 2024 ALA Schneider Family Book Award Honor title *Good Different*. She received her MFA in poetry from the University of Maryland, College Park. When she isn't writing or teaching, she's probably playing *Fire Emblem* or another tactics game. Find her online at megedenbooks.com or on Instagram at [@meden_author](https://www.instagram.com/meden_author).

Author Q&A

What was one of the main ideas you wanted to convey with this book?

I write what I need to learn and work through. My old pastor used to say, "I'm preaching to myself," and I feel the same way about my writing. Here, I particularly needed to process pain and grief and reconciliation with loving relationships that can also hurt you. While Selah in my first middle grade novel, *Good Different*, learns how to be kind to herself, V has to learn to make room for grace for herself as well as others.

In all my books, I really want to show characters as messy, complicated, and realistic. That's a huge focus in this book. We often want to put people into boxes: this person's great; this person's horrible. But most people are too messy for a single box. We contain multitudes. I think this is hardest to remember when there's hurt, but I think this is perhaps when it's most important to strive to see people's humanness.

The first bit of inspiration for this book was a photo you found in an antique store, years ago. A sepia photo of a young white girl with the words "Our Broken Doll" written on the bottom. How did that photo lead to this book?

Being neurodivergent in a neurotypical world can often make you feel like you're broken, or imitating a person. A big part of *The Girl in the Walls* is how we can internalize ableism as a survival mechanism, and how that can bring out our ugliest sides. It can mean we not only think of ourselves as broken, but we think of others as broken too if they don't follow a certain set of "rules" or expectations. Families can be our biggest advocates but also can hit us where it hurts the most: Many well-meaning family members can throw neurodivergent kids under the bus, trying to "toughen" them up for the world, or to teach them to mask, or to get them to act the way they want them to. This is often with the intended goal of helping these kids survive and succeed in this strange world, but it ends up often causing much more harm.

As I explored these ideas in my writing, the motif of dolls came up, and I thought back to that photo I'd found. I realized the photo could actually be a literal object in the world of the story, and everything came together in a way that made sense and helped me articulate what I had been feeling all along but struggled to find words for.

This book grapples with a lot of big emotions. It's about the power of emotions. And about how our feelings and emotions aren't always a representation of what's real. Can you talk a bit about the role of emotions in this book?

Emotions are messy, like people. Often I hear "follow your heart" but I think this is complicated. There is a value to listening to and being aware of our feelings. They can be good warning signs that something is wrong, or that we need to change something in our lives. But if we let feelings be unchecked pilots, I think that can be dangerous, too. I know my feelings are not reliable narrators, and do not always tell me what's true. They also change very quickly! I wanted to talk about this messiness for kids, because I think it's really, really important we have a healthy, balanced view of our feelings. Feelings should be validated, but also put into perspective of truth.

Author Q&A (Continued)

***The Girl in the Walls* is about how everyone has secrets, and hurt, and a story—even if we don't always like their behavior, it's worth slowing down to understand those around us. Why do you see that as an important message?**

We are in a particularly divisive time. There is so much hate and anger and assumption-making happening, and it's scary and upsetting. We have so many ways to speak, but so often feel unheard or spoken over. I know I make so many conclusions about people who do things differently than me, and I have to proactively slow down, listen, and ask questions. Sometimes I'm really surprised by what I hear! I learn, and as a result, I grow. I want to be someone with a spirit of willingness to listen and grow, and I want to model that for the next generation, too.

The main character, V, always wears fun socks. Are you a fun sock wearer, and if so, what's your favorite pair?

YES! A few of my favorites are:

- Frida Kahlo
- Narwhals that say I AM STRANGE AND WONDERFUL
- Emperor's New Groove Kuzco llamas that say NO TOUCHY
- We don't talk about Bruno
- Mimikyu Pokémon socks