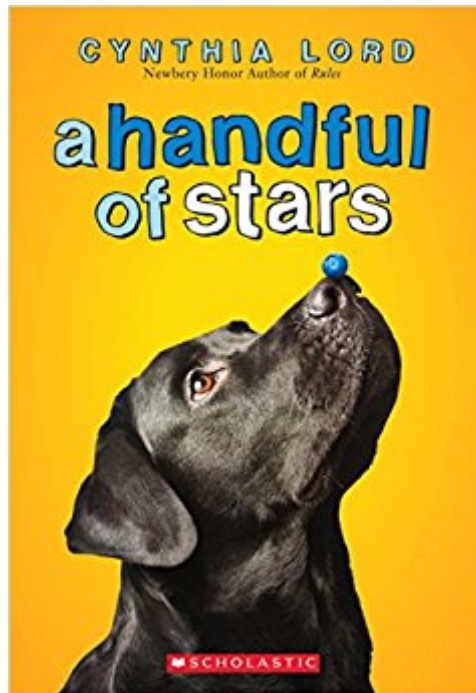




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# A Handful Of Stars



## Synopsis

When Lily's blind dog, Lucky, slips his collar and runs away across the wide-open blueberry barrens of eastern Maine, it's Salma Santiago who manages to catch him. Salma, the daughter of migrant workers, is in the small town with her family for the blueberry-picking season. After their initial chance meeting, Salma and Lily bond over painting bee boxes for Lily's grandfather, and Salma's friendship transforms Lily's summer. But when Salma decides to run in the upcoming Blueberry Queen pageant, they'll have to face some tough truths about friendship and belonging. Should an outsider like Salma really participate in the pageant-and possibly win? Set amongst the blueberry barrens and by the sea, this is a gorgeous new novel by Newbery Honor author Cynthia Lord that tackles themes of prejudice and friendship, loss and love.

## Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Scholastic Press; Reprint edition (May 9, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0545700280

ISBN-13: 978-0545700283

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.6 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 52 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #10,725 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Hispanic & Latino](#) #26 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism](#) #300 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Friendship](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Gr 4-6 • Two girls from seemingly different backgrounds bond over a blind dog and blueberries in Lord's latest heartwarmer. Lily lives in Maine, raised by her maternal grandparents, and Salma is from Puerto Rico. Her black lab, Lucky, is her strongest connection to her deceased mother. Lucky is slowly going blind and Lily is determined to raise money for an expensive and risky eye surgery to cure him; she paints wooden mason bee houses and sells them

in her grandparent's general store. Salma is in Maine for the summer with her family, migrant workers who live and work in the blueberry barrens. Lucky unexpectedly brings the girls together and they immediately bond over their love of dogs, art, and blueberry enchiladas. Salma is creative and artistic, something that Lily both admires and envies. When Salma decides to enter the Blueberry Queen pageant—something no migrant girl has ever done before—Lily's eyes are opened to the microaggressions of some of the townsfolk. There's also the surprising support from Hannah, Lily's former best friend and reigning Blueberry Queen, who offers to loan Salma a gown. Through her friendship with Salma, the protagonist finds a confidence she didn't know she had and she begins to recognize and question her own previously unexamined biases. Despite the slim page count, this middle grade novel's plot evolves organically. Lord's characters reveal themselves slowly within the narrative and the Maine setting is richly described. The bright cover featuring an adorable black lab is pure shelfbait; though readers looking for a animal tale will instead find a story that centers more on family, friendship, and growing pains. VERDICT A thoughtful work that examines cultural bias and will spark discussion. —Kiera Parrott, School Library Journal --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Praise for *A Handful of Stars*: "Salma's artistic creativity and gumption awaken Lily to the power of imagination, the importance of embracing change and knowing when to let go of the past, and the rewards of venturing beyond one's comfort zone." -- Publishers Weekly, starred review "The treatment of Salma's migrant life is matter-of-fact but direct, and Lily plausibly deals with possibilities of local racism and swells with indignation on behalf of her new friend... It's the straightforward and unaffected prose (highly suitable for a readaloud as well as reading alone) that really allows Lily's story to shine... it's hard to resist joining her on her journey toward greater maturity." -- Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, starred review Praise for *Half A Chance*: "[Lord] has combined vivid, cinematic description with deft characterization and handles several important issues with sensitivity, nuance, and great skill... A deeply enjoyable read." -- School Library Journal, starred review "With winning results, Lord brings the same sensitivity to the subject of dementia that she brought to autism in her Newbery Honor book, *Rules*." -- Kirkus Reviews, starred review Praise for *Rules*: Newbery Honor Book Schneider Family Book Award ALA Notable Children's Book

In *A HANDFUL OF STARS* by Cynthia Lord, 12-year-old Lily (short for Tigerlily) is having kind of a lonely summer. Her best friend Hannah is so obsessed with a boy that she doesn't have any time for the kinds of activities the two of them once enjoyed. Lily's grandma and grandpa are busy

running the general store in their small Maine seacoast town, and of course, Lily's never known her father and her mom's been gone since Lily was two. That's why Lily spends so much time with her dog Lucky; he's old and has gone blind, but he's Lily's last remaining connection to her mother, since she bought him when he was just a puppy. Lucky's an older dog now, but Lily's convinced that if she can just make enough money painting bee houses this summer, she can pay for an operation that might return his sight. One summer day, Lucky gets away from Lily and runs right into the fields where migrant workers are harvesting wild blueberries. A girl Lily's age named Salma helps rein Lucky in, and it turns out that Salma likes painting, too, but her paintings are real works of art, not just stencils like Lily paints. Salma agrees to help Lily raise money for Lucky's operation, and Lily agrees to help Salma compete for the title of Blueberry Queen. Even if each girl thinks the other's dream is a long shot, they support each other --- and that's what friendship is for, right? Lord, whose previous books have dealt with dementia and autism, could be easy to pigeonhole as an author of so-called issues-driven books. It's true that her novels include medical or social issues, in this case the difficulty of establishing relationships and achieving success as the child of a migrant worker family, but the beauty of Lord's writing and the genuine emotion conveyed in her story line elevates the novel beyond merely addressing those issues. In addition to being a captivating and realistic story of friendships old and new, *A HANDFUL OF STARS* will appeal to readers who love stories about dogs, since the relationship between Lily and Lucky is so affectionate and special. It's also a well-drawn portrait of a place that Lord knows well and is fond of (like Lily, she lives in Maine), and it's a portrait of a family continuing to recover from a grief that is now nearly a decade old. The novel includes a satisfying story arc, as Salma and Lily's friendship grows over the summer and culminates at the annual blueberry festival and pageant. And Lord recognizes and validates the complexity of her characters' situations, refusing to offer an artificially and unrealistically happy ending in favor of one that is both satisfying and bittersweet. Reviewed by Norah Piehl

Touching story. I enjoyed reading it. I really like Lily and Salma--they are sweet, thoughtful, creative, and fun girls. Lucky, Lily's dog, is also terrific. Lily's grandparents are special and I felt like I got to know them more in the second half of the book. Salma's mom, Mrs. Santiago, is a very kind, inclusive, and loving person--this is clear the few times we encounter her. It's nice to read about genuine connection and friendship. Each girl experienced loss and feels the loneliness and pain that accompany it. Lily and Salma gave of themselves for the other. It's rewarding for the reader! The scenery is described in detail and I can visualize wild Maine blueberry bushes. Chapter 15 made this

adult cry. An overall great tween read, especially because it has the potential to broaden a tween's perspective. This book will make a tween think and ask questions. I believe girls will enjoy this book more than boys. Each time I eat blueberries, I will stop to wonder whose hands and how many hands touched them so that I can enjoy them.

A Handful of Stars is a realistic fiction story about two girls from completely different backgrounds who become the unlikely of friends. Lily grew up in the small town in Maine, known only as a producer of wild blueberries, living above her grandparent's store. Salma was a migrant worker, who could never truly call one place home. Even though both lived extremely close, their worlds seemed miles away. They met when Lily's blind dog Lucky ran into the blueberry fields where Salma was working. Lily and Salma find out they have a lot in common, and soon become "star friends". But they both have different things they want to achieve. Lily wants to save up enough money for an operation on Lucky's eyes to help him see again, and Salma wants to win the Blueberry pageant, a prestigious beauty contest. With each other's help, will they get what they want? Read the book to find out! I loved how this book managed to rope so much information about Maine into a beautiful story. The facts enhanced the story so much, and made it a truly delightful reading experience. I specifically liked how the pageant brought in questions about wild blueberries. I learned the most from that section. I think the readers who would enjoy the book the most are people in the 8-12 range, especially girls. They would relate to Lily, Salma and their friendship the most. It is important to feel the power of their friendship because that's what makes this story magical. If you cannot relate, the magic is lost. I rated this book five stars because of how beautifully fact and fiction were woven together. I also rated it so high because of the powerful message it contained. A true friend will not care where you come from and how different you are. They will still value you. A true friend will support your dreams, whatever they may be. Reviewed by Anya A, age 10, Washington Metropolitan Mensa

One of my favorite books, this summer. I will be reading this to my students this fall. One of my favorite things about this book, is that the children's dialog sound real. In many books written by adults the children in the story have amazing vocabulary and intelligence. As I read this book, I kept thinking that sounds just like one of my students. I also can't wait to have an uncomfortable conversation with my students about immigration and racism. Because I find 10 year olds have a different and interesting prospective compared to my peers.

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