

Pete Hautman

Sweetblood (2003)

180 pages. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 (0-689-85048-4).

VOYA rating: 4Q 4P

Sixteen-year-old Lucy is trying to figure out what she is, but mostly she knows what she *isn't*. She dyes her hair black and always wears black clothes, but she vehemently denies being either punk or goth. She calls herself "Undead," because her life has been saved by modern medical science, and a vampire because she has insulin-dependent diabetes. She has an intelligent and surprisingly convincing theory that diabetics in the throes of ketoacidosis were the origin of vampire myths, but when she writes it up in a class essay, her teachers, parents, and doctor go ballistic and force her to see a therapist. Everyone's telling Lucy what to do and who to be, and the stress of teenage self-determination causes her to lose her ability to regulate her blood sugar levels, with almost fatal consequences.

I wholeheartedly recommend buying *Sweetblood* for both middle school and high school students. This short novel is a thought-experiment, coming-of-age story, and diabetes essay all rolled into one. Diabetic teens will see themselves in Lucy's struggles to regulate her blood sugar in spite of emotional turmoil, and non-diabetics will learn what it feels like to calculate carbohydrates vs. insulin, constantly, while still seeing themselves in Lucy's attempts to define her own identity. Unfortunately, some parents might challenge the book because of its references to goth culture and vampirism.