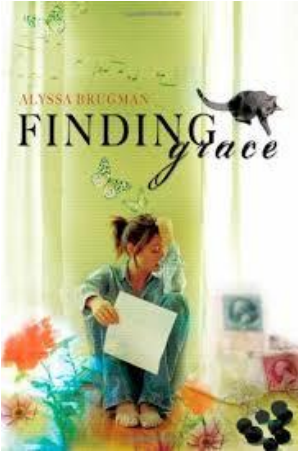


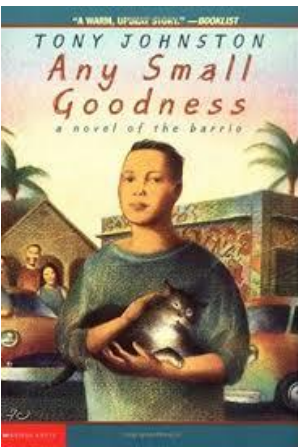
2021 Phoenix Award Winner



***Finding Grace* by Alyssa Brugman, Allen & Unwin, 2001**

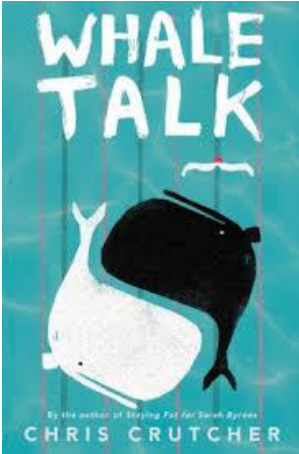
As they say in Australia, this YA novel is “a goer.” Narrated by 18-year-old Rachel, *Finding Grace* raises the hardest questions: How do people manage tragedy? How do they continue after devastating loss? When Mr. Preston, a rich school supporter and businessman, offers Rachel a generously compensated job as caretaker for Grace, who lives with brain damage after an accident, Rachel accepts in the spirit of “what I know.” This ironic motif not only shapes her learning about her own ignorance; it also balances the discovery that Grace, who cannot speak or share thoughts, may become her best teacher. This detective tale skillfully pulls Rachel into Grace’s life even as Rachel begins her own independent adulthood. By finding the grace to realize she does not know as much about life as she thought she did, Rachel stole our hearts and made us laugh out loud. We especially loved the question Rachel gets asked: “What are you going to do?” and the spiritual wisdom that follows: “Sometimes I just want to scream, ‘I’m just trying to finish what I’m doing now!’”

2021 Phoenix Honor Books



***Any Small Goodness* by Tony Johnston, Blue Sky Press, 2001**

In *Any Small Goodness*, a novella that begins and ends with a loving Mexican American family, Arturo’s father tells him “When no eyes are upon him, that is a person’s true test.” Tony Johnston crafts a world in which Arturo learns from his gentle parents and his lime-loving *abuela* that community is within our grasp to create. The small goodnesses that Arturo sees include the elderly neighbor who spends the night in a tree with the cat he tries to save; the NBA player who trusts the school to keep his fame quiet as he volunteers to coach basketball; and the school librarian who embraces not just her child patrons but their families too. Arturo and his family weather violence and loss with love, strength, and determination. Ultimately, Arturo’s friends resist the pull of gangs, family instability, and attempts to erase their heritage by learning to focus on the small goodness around them.



***Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher, HarperCollins, 2001**

This YA novel cuts to the chase in a truth-telling voice that makes change believable: “Whales don’t edit. . . if they think it, they say it, and if you are a whale, in a short amount of time you know exactly what it is to be you.” Narrator T. J. Jones is a racially-mixed upperclassman and a talented athlete who eschews school sports because he despises jock culture. When T.J. witnesses fellow student Chris Coughlin being bullied by football players for wearing his deceased older brother’s letter jacket, T.J. takes Chris under his wing. But he doesn’t stop there; T.J. recruits an unlikely swim team, “The Mermen,” that enables Chris and the other misfits who make up the Mermen to win letter jackets of their own. Like “The Loneliness of the Long-Distance

Runner,” this heart-wrenching, humorous story celebrates what athletics can be even as it critiques their corruption by adults who use high school sports for their own gratification. At every Mermen practice, as the characters learn the power of relationships and develop self-confidence in their undersized pool, readers share the sadness and triumph of these sweet, deep, funny underdogs. T.J.’s anger at bullies and racists gradually matures, but does not dissipate. Not many adolescent males tell their stories of pain and patience, self-doubt and confidence so openly.