

Eleven-year-old Harriet is precocious, sly, and altogether unapologetic. She dreams of becoming a writer and a spy, traversing her New York City neighborhood to peep on various interesting homes and taking copious notes on the activities of their residents. Her constant companion is a notebook, filled with information from her spy route and her personal, unfiltered thoughts. In nine bounding chapters, Fitzhugh allows readers to fall in love with Harriet, her nanny Ole Golly, and the regular characters in her life: boisterous Italian grocers, kind-hearted, feline-loving bachelors, and Harriet's irritating, fascinating, occasionally disgusting classmates. Then Old Golly leaves Harriet to continue her life elsewhere, Harriet's notebook is captured by the classmates it describes, and Harriet is left alone and hated. It's hard to imagine juvenile literature without Harriet, who welcomed the idea of troublesome, tactless, and downright *loud* protagonists. She isn't the nicest girl in town, and she doesn't understand why her friends and classmates would be angry that she's written truthfully about them (regardless of whether that truth might be considered "mean"). Isn't that just being a good spy? Almost sixty years on, the world in which Harriet lives, full of glamorous parties for mostly absent parents, spilling inkwells, and free-range children, is hardly even a memory. Modern readers are likely to find Harriet's reality quaint and charming, which only serves to make her witty and insightful writing more impressive. Harriet ponders what we all have found ourselves afraid to ask: How does it feel to fall in love? When I think about someone, are they thinking about me? What's wrong with being honest, even when it's offensive? Times have changed, but Harriet's appeal is as keen as ever, her triumphs and tragedies as infectious for her contemporaries as they are today. After all, at the end of the day, we've all dreamt at least a little about being a spy.

- Kiri Palm, Reviewer