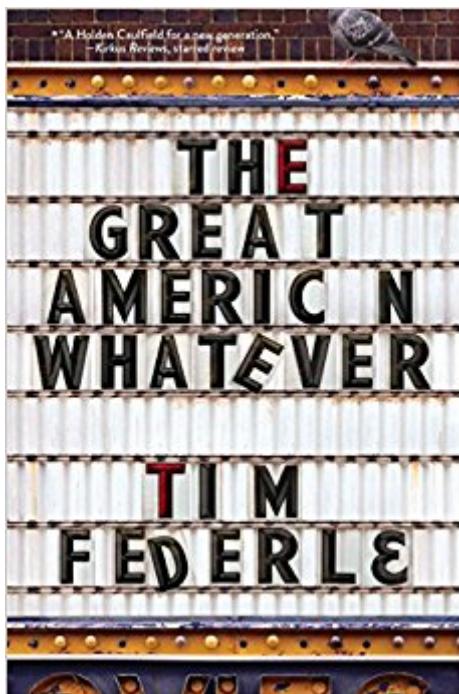


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# The Great American Whatever



## Synopsis

From the award-winning author of *Five, Six, Seven, Nate!* and *Better Nate Than Ever* comes a Holden Caulfield for a new generation • (Kirkus Reviews, starred review). Quinn Roberts is a sixteen-year-old smart aleck and Hollywood hopeful whose only worry used to be writing convincing dialogue for the movies he made with his sister Annabeth. Of course, that was all before "before Quinn stopped going to school, before his mom started sleeping on the sofa" and before the car accident that changed everything. Enter: Geoff, Quinn's best friend who insists it's time that Quinn came out "at least from hibernation. One haircut later, Geoff drags Quinn to his first college party, where instead of nursing his pain, he meets a guy "okay, a hot guy" and falls, hard. What follows is an upside-down week in which Quinn begins imagining his future as a screenplay that might actually have a happily-ever-after ending "if, that is, he can finally step back into the starring role of his own life story.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tim Federle's Movie Song Playlist for *The Great American Whatever* Do you ever wish your life had a soundtrack? You know, like for violins to come in as you're breaking up with somebody, or drums to thump when you're being chased down an alley? (OK, maybe that's just my life.) My lead character in *The Great American Whatever* is an aspiring filmmaker — his dream is to be the next Spielberg or Tarantino — so I thought it was only fitting that he'd punctuate his own "life soundtrack" with iconic songs from some of his favorite movies. Pop some popcorn and grab your earbuds. The "Flying Theme" from *E.T. - Probbbbbably* my #1 most-listened to song for writing

inspiration. (I'm biased, because my first novel included E.T. as an entire fangirl subplot, but I promise these horns will send you over the moon.) "Mrs. Robinson" from *The Graduate* - Filmmaker icon Mike Nichols famously rejected Paul Simon's first two song efforts for the *Graduate* soundtrack, but three's a charm with the first rock song ever to win a Grammy for Record of the Year. "As Time Goes By" from *Casablanca* - *Nostalgia*: the song, basically. In *The Great American Whatever* • Quinn looks back on his young life a lot, wondering how things could have gone differently. *As Time Goes By* is a sweet-sounding, slightly-sad song that Quinn would like, because he's 17, and being 17 is all about sweetness and sadness. "Everybody's Talkin'" from *Midnight Cowboy* - This tune basically plays every time a young Jon *Angelina Jolie*'s Dad • Voight enters a new scene in this movie, which makes me wish I had my own theme song for every time I visit the fridge during a writing session. "Unchained Melody" from *Ghost* - Never has wet clay seemed so dirty. Leave it to a movie about a hot dead guy to bring this old Righteous Brothers song roaring back to haunt modern audiences. FYI if you don't cry you're a ghost. "Goldfinger" from *Goldfinger* - Long is the legacy of a new James Bond theme song topping the charts, but it's Shirley Bassey's camp classic *Goldfinger* that leaves me shaken AND stirred. "Rainbow Connection" from *The Muppet Movie* - First of all, Kermit, ARE there so many songs about rainbows? Second of all, I forgive you because I'm SOBBING. "9 to 5" from *9 to 5* - The only country singer with her own theme park, Dolly Parton knows a thing or two about putting in a day's work. Blast this one in your corporate cubicle. "Over the Rainbow" from *The Wizard of Oz* - The next time you're full of doubt, just keep in mind that MGM wanted to cut *Over the Rainbow* from the song for fear it would go over the head of little ones, and I don't mean munchkins. "Let the River Run" from *Working Girl* - My favorite pop/choral mashup by none other than the daughter of Richard L. Simon: one half of Simon & Schuster, who publishes my books! (OK, *Simon's daughter* is also known as Carly Simon.) I listen to her anthem when I have to face something daunting like cardio or my inbox.

Gr 10 Up • "Middle grade superstar Federle's first young adult novel is a sad yet funny coming-of-age story. Quinn Roberts, the 16-year-old screenwriting protagonist, is still entrenched in grief over the tragic death of his older sister, Annabeth, six months after an accident. Geoff, Quinn's best friend, resolves to get Quinn back in the world, and he successfully nudges his friend back toward society. Quinn imagines his future as if it were a screenplay, a coping device for this witty and wisecracking teen. Narrated by the author, this book features authentic dialogue, clear character building, and a combination of grief, depression, and sexuality that come together for a

modern and engaging story. VERDICT Young adult listeners who have experienced loss will relate, and older fans of the author will enjoy. ["An essential purchase for all collections": SLJ 1/16 starred review of the S. & S. book.]â "Denise A. Garofalo, Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, NY --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

Funny, heartbreaking, filled with teen angst, Tim Federleâ™s book made me a teenager again in the most bittersweet way. Quinn Roberts reveals himself to the reader bit by bit, and as the camera metaphorically pulls back, and we gradually see the big picture, we appreciate the tender, damaged resilience of this young man. To some degree, all teen novels must be voyages of self-discovery. This book is no exception, but Federleâ™s wonderful writing and Quinnâ™s wry, endearing personality offer an intense reminder of what, to some degree, we all went through to survive into adulthood. Quinn is gay, but that fact is more of an annoyance to him than a trauma. âœIt just seems like such a hassle to come out. I want to just be out.âœ Problem is, heâ™s still trying to cope with the sudden, tragic death of his sister Annabeth, which has thrown a monkey wrench into his familyâ™s ability to cope. Fortunately, Tim has Geoff, his best friend forever. Geoff is the catalyst who ignites the sparks that set the ball rolling, as it were. Geoff is a remarkable character, and Quinn knows it as much as we do. I donâ™t want to give things away. Itâ™s not a long book, but itâ™s superbly crafted to wring every possible emotion out of us. I surely thought of Stephen Chboskyâ™s âœThe Perks of Being a Wallflowerâœ as I read this, but of course here the gay kid is the centerpiece, and to me that makes all the difference. âœThe Great American Whateverâœ is unquestionably one of the best YA novels Iâ™ve read. It touched me deeply and made me envious of Federleâ™s gift as a writer.

I've read a lot of gay novels lately, mostly escapist M/M romances. I mean, I have standards. They have to be well-written, like Josh Lanyon or Brad Vance. It can't be just endless sex scenes strung together with a paper thin plot. But this. This is an entire level altogether. This isn't M/M. It is a novel with a gay protagonist. I could recommend this to any of my friends without any embarrassment. In fact, I think I will. One review compared this to *Catcher in the Rye*. And the comparison is completely valid. Honestly, it might be better. If I were teaching high school English, I would certainly have them read this and not that. But don't think because it is good that it is not fun. It is. There's a lot to think about but there is a lot of fun, too. So try it. And, Tim Federle, well done.

When I read the summary I was expecting a completely different story than what I got. I'm not one of those people that complains when a character grieves "too much". I think it's realistic to have various kinds of grief represented in stories. What bothered me was how self centered Quinn was. He acted like his grief was more important than everyone else's. Add to that how he kept insulting Geoff in his mind the entire story and he was nothing but kind and loyal to him. It was frustrating. Another thing I didn't like was how his being gay felt like an afterthought. I didn't really believe it is what I'm trying to say. And his relationship with Amir just felt incredibly fake. I couldn't even buy them as friends. Amir was nice but I just wasn't feeling them. But what I did appreciate besides Geoff was how Quinn's grief was handled. I truly felt for him and his loss. He said some really intelligent stuff about his feelings and how he described them.

I don't read YA that frequently, it can be a little formulaic. And while in many ways this book sticks to the themes of every coming of age tale that has come before, it's done so well by Tim Federle I don't even care. It's a quick read, but perfectly paced with just the right amount of humor to offset the tragedy, and just the right amount of realism to offset all the standard YA tropes. I'd highly recommend if you are interested in any of the following: YA fiction, Pittsburgh, film making, gay protagonists (where sexuality is not the main source of conflict or angst), coming of age stories, *The Perks of Being a Wildflower* (it's an easy comparison to make. I'll be honest though, I think I like *The Great American Whatever* more.)

One of the latest YA novels to tell the tempestuous and angst but ultimately affirming tale of adolescent coming out, Tim Federle's *\*The Great American Whatever\** problematizes the romantic notion of 21st-century queer affirmation by complicating the protagonist's sexual identity development with grief over the death of his older sister and managing his own control issues. Quinn Roberts, sometimes called "Win" (a clear signifier of his eventual triumph) by his late sister and his new paramour, "aspires to be a successful Hollywood screenwriter. After his childhood crush and former babysitter shared with him the formula for successfully crafting an epic heroic adventure (which nearly replicates Joseph Campbell's monomyth paradigm), Quinn collaborated with his sister Annabeth on a number of quirky independent films. He also casts himself as the hero of his own life and imagines life itself as a screenplay that he has the power to control. The people with whom he interacts are scene partners. He doesn't engage in conversation; he speaks scripted dialogue. He even renders parts of his first-person narrative as movie scenes complete with dialogue, set descriptions,

and stage directions. As he struggles to cope with his sister's untimely death (for which he at least partially blames himself), he also tries to help his mother come to terms with the loss (his father abandoned them long ago) as he discovers the limits of just how well he knows his best friend. And he's falling in love for the first time. Federle depicts these events with all of the sweet innocence and snide frustration that so deftly characterize adolescence. Although the novel tackles some heavy issues—coming out, the death of a loved one, first love, virginity (and the loss thereof)—it never feels particularly heavy. The novel's sole weakness might be the blithe spirit with which it regards profound developmental aspects of maturity and sexuality, but its many attributes more than compensate for that.

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