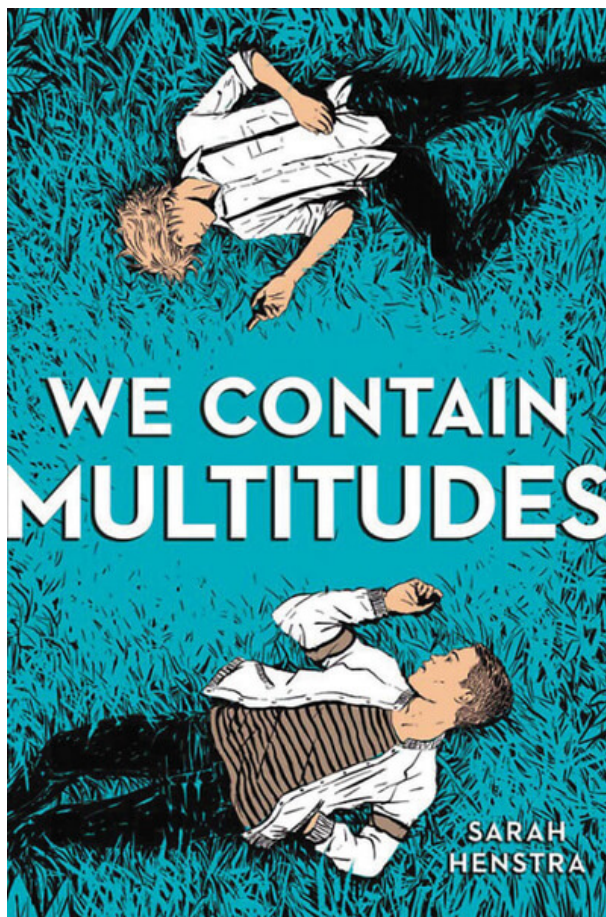


We Contain Multitudes

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In Sarah Henstra's **We Contain Multitudes**, an unlikely duo are paired up as pen pals for a weekly writing assignment, an arrangement that leads to friendship and even love.

Senior Adam "Kurl" Kurlansky and sophomore Jonathan "Jo" Hopkirk couldn't be more mismatched: Kurl plays football and works for his family's roofing business, while Jo plays the mandolin and loves Walt Whitman so much he dresses like him.

Telling the story solely via their exchanged letters, Henstra pulls off an especially neat trick: Jo and Kurl start off as different as night and day in both voice and temperament, but over time they begin to sound more like one another as they discover common ground and learn a bit more about each other's lives. Jo is bullied mercilessly at school but is also grieving a loss from early childhood; Kurl is obsessed with his brother's military service in Afghanistan, yet he fails to make the connection between combat trauma and his own perilous home life. Henstra doesn't sugarcoat any of these challenges, which makes the teens' love story a hard-won treasure. Throughout the Minneapolis-set novel runs a sad and lovely thread about Prince, which encourages playlist creation while reading.

There's something about seeing the world through these boys' separate points of view that brings the story to life in a visceral way. **We Contain Multitudes** is a heartbreaker in many ways, but it's ultimately a beautiful story about how love (and poetry) are sometimes enough to carry the day.