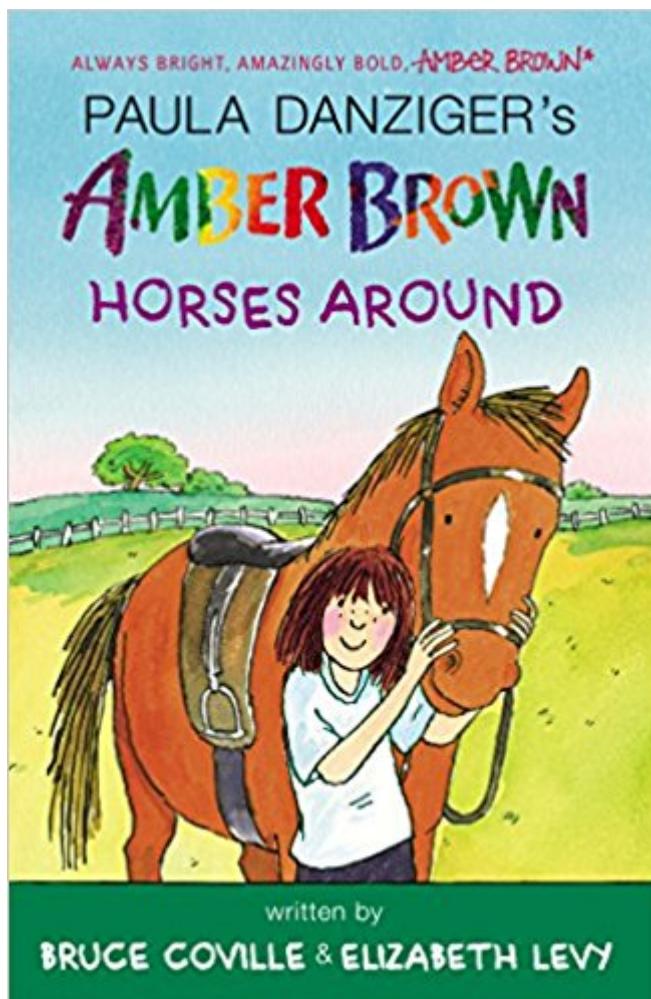


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# Amber Brown Horses Around



## **Synopsis**

Always Bright, Amazingly Bold, Amber Brown! Amber Brown is one happy camper. She and her best friend, Justin, are spending the summer at Camp Cushetunk. Learning to ride Cinnamon, the sweetest horse ever, is so amazing that Amber doesn't even mind shoveling her poop. Then Amber becomes the target of a series of pranks. Certain she knows who is behind them, Amber and her friends come up with the biggest prank ever to get revenge. But the outcome is not what they expect. Turns out horsing around can lead to big trouble. But sometimes, Amber is surprised to learn, big trouble can lead to big changes for the better.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: 0570 (What's this?)

Series: Amber Brown (Book 12)

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Puffin Books; Reprint edition (August 4, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0147515521

ISBN-13: 978-0147515520

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #113,162 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #55 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Marriage & Divorce #401 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Values #1093 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Chapter Books & Readers > Chapter Books

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## **Customer Reviews**

Paula Danziger (1944-2004) was a flamboyantly funny and deeply honest writer who had a direct line into kids' hearts and funny bones. Bruce Coville lives in Syracuse, New York. Elizabeth Levy lives in New York City.

Chapter One, Amber Brown, am one happy camper. This is a strange thing to say, because I have never been at camp. . . . and I am not there now! Even so, I am a happy camper because I

made it through fourth grade and tomorrow I am heading for Camp Cushetunk. That's the good news. The bad news is that first I have to pack. I hate packing. There are too many choices to make! I am looking at the pile of stuff on my bed when Mom and Max knock on my door. I know it is both of them, because the door is open. I have trained them to knock even when it is. Max is my new stepfather. I was kind of rotten to him when he started to go out with Mom, but I kind of love him now. "Come in," I say. Mom is carrying the packing list that the camp sent. I like lists. I especially like this one because there is a little box next to each item that you can check when you've taken care of it. This is very satisfying. However, the list is missing things like "Gorilla" and "pig-taking-a-bubble-bath alarm clock/bank." I think I have to leave those things at home. Not because I don't want to have them with me. It's just that I don't want the other campers to make fun of me for bringing them. Sometimes it's hard to figure out what is too baby and what is all right. Max holds up a plastic bag. I just went to the drugstore, Amber. I think I got everything we still needed. I thought I liked lists, but I am nothing compared to Max. He LOVES lists. He also loves labels. I think maybe the two things go together. He has had a fine time ironing name tags onto my shirts and shorts. I didn't let him do my underwear. I made Mom do that. When I asked Max how he got so handy with an iron, he explained that it was a side effect of living alone for so many years. Max starts to unpack the drugstore bag. He holds up a toothbrush. "You're going to love this, Amber. It's got a timer inside and it lights up after you've brushed for two minutes." Two minutes is how long the dentist wants me to brush, but I usually get bored before two minutes go by. The light is very cool. Mom says, "Why don't you go grab Amber's towels, Max." While he is gone, she picks up one of my T-shirts and looks at the name tag. "Amber Brown. I love that I gave you such a colorful name." I love my name too. But I don't love that Mom's last name is no longer Brown. When she got married to Max, it became Turner. Max comes back in and puts a stack of towels on the bed. Then he goes to my desk. "Make sure everything has a name tag on it before you pack it." I don't think the camp really meant everything. Mom says, "No one puts a name tag on a tube of toothpaste." I look at Max and start to laugh. He has a tube of toothpaste in one hand and a fine-point Sharpie in the other. He drops the Sharpie and tries to pretend he wasn't about to label my toothpaste. "Busted!" I say. Mom sighs. "Oh, Max. Next thing you know, you'll be labeling her sticks of gum!" I can't tell whether she is amused or exasperated. When the trunk is packed, they go downstairs. "Don't forget we're leaving for the airport in fifteen minutes." Mom calls over her shoulder. Tonight, Justin Daniels, my very best friend ever, is flying up from Alabama. He is going to Cushetunk too! This is the best, best, best thing ever. The reason it is the

best, best, best thing ever is that I almost never get to see Justin anymore. That's because of one of the worst, worst, worst things ever. . . . . his parents moved to Alabama! I thought they should leave Justin behind so we could keep going to school together, but they refused. Now we're going to be at camp together for four whole weeks. The idea is so exciting, I am afraid my head will explode before we even leave for the airport to get Justin. I decide to check my e-mail, just to try to keep my head in one piece while I am waiting. I have only had e-mail for a few days. . . . it was a reward for graduating from fourth grade. My e-mail name is "Notacrayon." When I open the account, I see that there is a message from Brandi Colwin. It is addressed to me and Kelly Green. This is another reason I am so sure Camp Cushetunk will be wonderful. Brandi and Kelly are my best friends from school, and they are going too. It should be great! Brandi's subject line is "Bulletin! Bulletin! Bulletin!" She is practicing to be a newscaster, and this is her way of letting Kelly and me know that she has something important to tell us. I open the e-mail, and groan. Chapter Two! I don't watch the news that much, but I see it more often now that Max is with us. And something I've noticed is that most of the news is bad. Brandi's e-mail is definitely something that belongs on the bad news channel. OMG! I JUST FOUND OUT THAT HANNAH BURTON IS GOING TO CAMP CUSHETUNK!!! I want to beat my head against the keyboard. Hannah and I have been in school together forever, and we have never liked each other. Hannah Burton is tinfoil on your teeth. . . . . itching powder down your back. . . . a giant booger in your soup. "What if we're in a bunk with her?" I e-mail back. Before Brandi can answer, Max calls, "Time to go to the airport!" I am out of my chair, down the stairs, and into the car while Mom and Max are still getting their things together. I checked the flight, Max says as he climbs into the driver's seat. "It's right on time." It feels like the airport is a million miles away. Every stop sign and traffic light makes me want to scream. I want to be there NOW. Mom and Max are yakking away like this is just a normal ride. I realize they are talking about the movies they want to see while I am gone. I am not sure I like this. . . . I think they should just stay home and miss me. I know that is silly, but I can't always control how I feel about things. When we finally get to the airport, we have to walk a billion zillion miles from the parking garage to where we are supposed to meet Justin. Because he is a kid traveling alone, one of the airplane people will walk him out to us. I see him! But he is not looking for me. He is chatting away to the woman walking beside him. She is in a uniform and looks very official. She is also very beautiful. For some reason I find this very annoying. Suddenly he turns in our direction. "Amber!" he cries, and runs toward me. Just like when he came up for Mom and Max's wedding, we almost hug, and then stop. I look at him. His hair has gotten longer, and he is

even more tan than the last time I saw him. But he is still Justin. Then he smiles, and I see the big change. He has braces!â œThis is Ms. Block,â • Justin says. â œSheâ ™s in training to be a pilot.â • Ms. Block shakes hands with Mom and Max and asks them for ID to make sure we are the people who are supposed to pick up Justin. Mom thanks her, and Ms. Block walks away. Justin watches her go. I tap him on the shoulder. He turns back to me and says, â œI think I want to be a pilot when I grow up.â • â œCome on, flyboy,â • Max says. â œWe need to get your luggage.â • â œWas it scary traveling alone?â • I ask Justin.â œNo, it was kind of fun. Except they almost paid too much attention to me. But I had my own little TV set. That was cool!â • The luggage comes out on something called a carousel, which would make you think it was like a merry-go-round because it does go around and around. But there arenâ ™t any horses. Itâ ™s a big oval that carries the suitcases and backpacks past the people waiting to claim them. I soooooo want to climb onto it and take a ride.â .â .â .â . I bet it would be fun. This is when I realize that Max is getting to know me a little too well. He looks down at me and says firmly, â œDonâ ™t even think about it!â • â œThatâ ™s mine!â • Justin says, pointing to a big trunk. Max hauls it off the carousel. â œOoof! What did you pack in here? Your little brother?â • â œI hope heâ ™s not in there!â • Justin says. â œOne of the reasons I wanted to go to camp was to get away from him!â • We laugh and head for the car. When we get home, I say, â œCome on, Justin. Iâ ™ll show you around the new house.â • â œGreat,â • Mom says. â œMax and I will start the grill. Weâ ™re having a barbecue to celebrate your last night at home before you go to camp.â • When we get to my room, I show Justin the place of honor in my closet where I keep our chewing gum ball. We started making the ball way back in second grade. Justin was going to throw it out when he moved. That started our worst fight ever. I am glad we still have it. It proves that we will always stick together.â œI was afraid your mother might make you throw it away when you were moving,â • he says.

Amber is back one more time, and this time, she's at camp. She falls in love with horseback riding, gives swimming a chance, and even gets to spend time with Justin, her best friend, but she's been the butt of some very cruel jokes, and she's ready to fight back. Amber learns a valuable lesson at camp, and I think this book is the perfect end to the series

I didn't read it but my daughter did, she liked it, so for a six year old I would recommend it.

Great gift for 3rd grade girl.

Good

Bulletin! Bulletin!! Bulletin!!! I loved it! It was awesome that Amber got to hang out with Brandi, Kelly and even Justin during the summer. Glad we get to see more of Justin and Amber's friendship. I felt sorry for Amber, but I'm glad I got to find out the real reasons for the pranks. I cried near the end, that's how amazing and touching the story was. The illustrations have always been great at conveying Amber and the other characters but one of the images of making a bigger "circle" by the end made me feel both happy and tearful. If this is the last book (which I definitely don't want!), I wouldn't consider it a bad place to end. Bad things are said to come full circle, but I believe when you start doing good things, it too will come full circle back to you. I've never met the original author, but I'm sure she'd love the way things worked out for Amber!!

Perfect

I grew up reading Amber Brown books, and upon rereading the series as an adult, the original books written by Danziger still hold up very well. They take a realistic view of what it's like to be an elementary school student learning to adjust to divorced parents, and Amber's voice is strong and clear. When I found out the series had been continued with three new books, I was excited to find out what new adventures Amber had had. "Tickled Pink" and "On the Move" are markedly different from the other Amber books, but "Horses Around" is different enough to be disappointing. This is definitely a departure from the usual topic of the series. While most of the Amber Brown books are centered around life in split custody, in this one, Amber is at camp for almost all of the book, and the story is centered on peer relationships. It started strong, but after the first few chapters, it's all about swimming, horseback riding, and a girl who's bullying Amber. In the last few chapters, her parents reappear, but their voices are highly unrealistic and don't at all sound like they did in previous books. One of the things that made Amber enjoyable to read about in previous books was that she truly was a good kid. She did things without thinking sometimes (getting her ears pierced without permission, yelling at her parents), but she always communicated her feelings truthfully and eloquently, and was never truly mean-spirited. Maybe it's that she's getting older, but this book sees a drastic departure from the old Amber. A large section is about how another camper is bullying her, so Amber and her friends plan a vicious prank to get back at the bully, and follow through with their plan over several days. I was really disappointed to see this. The book series that was once so unique in its perspective on dealing with divorce and family relationships has now dissolved into

girls being catty to each other, just like hundreds of other children's novellas on the market. Amber's bully, Hannah Burton, is also extremely unrealistic here. She's been bullying Amber for years, and again - until now, things had been handled realistically. She was rude, but not vicious, and Amber stood up to her the way most nine- or ten-year-olds would. At the end of this book, it turns out all they have to do is sit down together and have a little talk about "making the circle bigger," and now Amber and Hannah magically are friends (not to mention Amber's parents are, equally magically, getting along). It really sours the ending. While it was great originally to see a continuation of the series, perhaps now it's time to let Amber go. She's no longer the spunky kid she once was, and is now indistinguishable from most other children's book protagonists. Sad.

I think I jumped in the middle or the end of the series of *Amber Brown Horses Around* by Paula Danziger, and fellow authors...but that was ok since I was brought up to speed with a few questions I had that were answered about her situations in her life and her friends. I found the book very refreshing in the story line about the importance of understanding the emotions of the personalities of new and old friends, the little stress of those who you don't get along with, and the budding feelings that are coming to a new level with her best friend Justin, all so very true to life of a fourth grade student. The dilemma of divorce and ending up with two sets of parents played an extremely important role in this book. Being sent off to camp by her Mom and stepdad was at first an exciting adventure, since seeing her best friend Justin was going to be the best part, as they had been separated I'm presuming from Amber's parents divorce. Camp sounded good until Amber finds out that she will be bunking with her not-so much-school friend, Hannah. As camp life begins Amber realizes her love for a special horse, but when pranks begin to happen to Amber, she finally decides enough is enough, as she presumes who the prankster is. Could pay back be the answer? A valuable lesson is learned in the book, as I'm not going to give it away... but let's just say that this is an amazing read for middle school kids since there are strong adult roles that are fair and just and very well established. I will say, at the end of the book, I welled up with tears at the end result...who knew?

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