

Librarian Booktalk Guide: Heart of a Shepherd

A. Interest Level – Heart of a Shepherd is a MG novel with a 12 year old protagonist. The reading level is fairly easy and the main character has high school and college age brothers so it may be of interest to older readers and accessible to reluctant readers. It is a very boy-oriented story, but will appeal to girls who love animals and anyone who has a soft spot in their heart for cowboys.

B. Genre – middle grade, boy-oriented, realistic, contemporary fiction, action adventure, western, war story, coming of age, spiritual journey, story with animals.

C. Related Topics – Iraq war, military families, mixed-faith families, American west, farming and ranching, wild fires

D. Booktalk Synopsis -Brother has never been the rancher that his father and the older boys are. Sure, he can ride a horse, rescue a wayward calf, or mend a broken fence, but his heart just doesn't seem to be in it. Even worse, every time one of the ranch animals dies, he feels the loss too keenly. Still, with four older brothers to carry the load, it's never been much of a problem.

Then Brother's father is shipped off to Iraq with the rest of his reserve unit. With the older boys away at school, Brother must help his grandparents keep the ranch going. He's determined to maintain the ranch just as his father left it, in the hope that doing so will ensure his father's safe return. But life rarely goes according to plan. The hardships Brother faces will not only change the ranch but also reveal his true calling.

E. One Line Hook – In a family full of ranchers and soldiers, one brother was different. One brother was left at home when Dad deployed to Iraq. One brother promised to keep everything the same. Have you ever made a promise you couldn't keep?

F. Related Reads – Bull Rider by Suzanne Morgan Williams, The Phantom Stallion Series by Terri Farley, Hank the Cowdog by John R Erickson and Gerald L Holms (for younger readers), and Sunrise Over Fallujah by Walter Dean Myers (for mature readers).