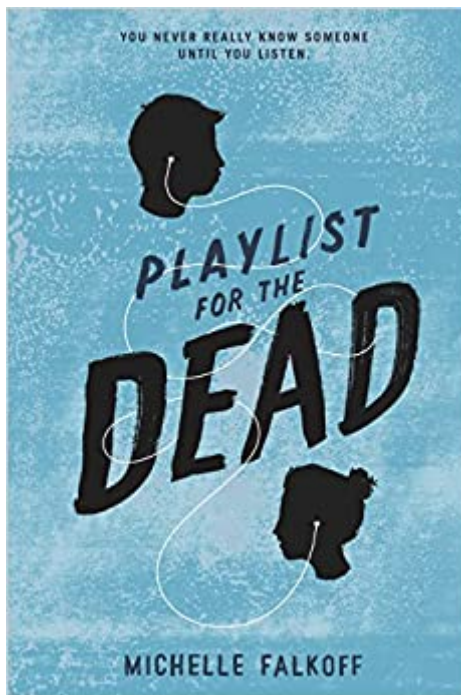


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# Playlist For The Dead



## Synopsis

“A page-turner that combines genuine intrigue with heartbreak and desire.” —Holly Goldberg Sloan, New York Times bestselling author of *Counting by 7s* Part mystery, part love story, and part coming-of-age tale in the vein of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *The Spectacular Now*, Michelle Falkoff’s debut novel is an honest and gut-wrenching first novel about loss, rage, what it feels like to outgrow a friendship that’s always defined you—and the struggle to redefine yourself. There was a party. There was a fight. The next morning, Sam’s best friend, Hayden, was dead. And all he left Sam was a playlist of songs and a suicide note: For Sam “listen and you’ll understand. To figure out what happened, Sam has to rely on the playlist and his own memory. But the more he listens, the more he realizes that his memory isn’t as reliable as he thought. And it might only be by taking out his earbuds and opening his eyes to the people around him that he’ll finally be able to piece together his best friend’s story. And maybe have a chance to change his own.” An absorbing and sensitive read.

“Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books” Falkoff lightens the substantial topics of grief, bullying, and suicide with Sam’s engaging investigation.

“ALA Booklist” Realistic and well-written. The strong characters, dialogue and the use of the playlist to structure the book make this a good pick for struggling readers.

“School Library Journal” Falkoff treats a difficult topic with delicacy and care.

“Publishers Weekly” Truly powerful moments.

“Kirkus Reviews

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up "Accustomed to operating outside of the major social scene, Sam is disappointed when a rare party he attends is ruined by a fight with his best friend, Hayden. Disappointment fades quickly when he discovers that Hayden killed himself afterward. Rocked by the tragedy, Sam is left puzzling over tracks that his friend left for a playlist and struggling to figure out who he is without Hayden around. Despite the heavy subject matter, the overall tone of the book is less somber than the title would indicate, and it is a quick, engaging read. Falkoff nails the war-zone mentality and painful symbiosis of high school friendships. The mixture of grief, anger, and guilt that Sam works through is realistic and well written, and his reactions to Hayden's music choices further illuminates not only his struggle but also how their friendship was beginning to change. The characters and concept work better than the plot"it gets an all-loose-ends-tied-up treatment at the end. This is especially frustrating as an entire eerie subplot is explained away in the course of a short paragraph. The strong characters, dialogue and the use of the playlist to structure the book make this a good pick for struggling readers. Hand this to fans of the movie Superbad and Spotify-obsessives."Erinn Black Salge, Saint Peter's Prep, Jersey City, NJ

"An absorbing and sensitive read." • (Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books) "Debut author Falkoff lightens the substantial topics of grief, bullying, and suicide with Sam's engaging investigation." • (ALA Booklist) "Realistic and well-written" [The strong characters, dialogue and the use of the playlist to structure the book make this a good pick for struggling readers." • (School Library Journal) "Falkoff treats a difficult topic with delicacy and care." • (Publishers Weekly) "A nice premise with some truly powerful moments." • (Kirkus Reviews) "[A] debut novel that limns the shifting boundaries of teen friendship, loyalty and identity. Playlist takes the expected conventions of stories about teen grief and turns them inside out, keeping readers guessing until the final chapters." • (Austin American-Statesman)

Michelle Falkoff's *PLAYLIST FOR THE DEAD* is a moving, thought-provoking, and wonderfully told story about a boy who's trying to come to grips with his best and only friend's suicide and understand just what his friend was trying to say through the playlist he made for him. It is a story that tackles a tough subject, but does so in a way that is not too heavy, yet still weighty enough for readers to make an emotional connection with the story and its characters and to give them a number of things to think about. It introduces a boy who is completely lost, alone, riddled with guilt, and desperate to understand what part he played in his friend's decision. It

follows him in the days and year after the suicide as he tries to interpret the meaning behind each song in the playlist and build a new life for himself. The author lets both readers and her main character, Sam, try and solve the puzzle together about just what led Hayden to choose to end his life. Through Sam's memories, the memories of a few others who knew him, and the songs on Hayden's playlist, readers will get to know Hayden, come to empathize with his struggles, and perhaps understand why he did what he did. And while this is in part a story about Hayden, it's very much a story about Sam and everyone that Hayden left behind. **PLAYLIST FOR THE DEAD** focuses on what happens to those whose lives Hayden impacted, how they cope with the loss, how they adapt, how they survive. It is sad and sweet and heartfelt and heartbreaking. It asks the question "why," and it reveals the answer in a way that feels a little bit like a mystery. It gives readers a peek into a friendship that was on the verge of changing, one with secrets, one that had its ups and downs, but one that still had a strong bond. And it invites readers to listen to the songs, which are announced at the beginning of each chapter, in order to feel even more connected. Michelle Falkoff created a likable and thoughtful and interesting character in Sam to tell her story through. He was shy and awkward, like Hayden, but he was also much stronger than his friend, making for a compelling narrative. She wrote a story with a number of important messages, quietly delivered, that will keep readers thinking long after the story's end. Ideas about forgiveness, and blame, and vengeance, and acceptance. **PLAYLIST FOR THE DEAD** is a poignant and engaging and relatable story and one that is a must for readers who enjoy incredibly touching, coming-of-age stories and those who know just what it's like to be in Sam's shoes.

I admit I grabbed this book by the title, thinking it was going to be something like Perry's *Killer Playlist* so I was a little taken back by the subject. Still, I like the concept of a book with a playlist. Unfortunately the idea to have a playlist was the last interesting thing about the book. I really tried to get into it because of the subject, unfortunately the characters just weren't all that fascinating or compelling. If you're looking for an interesting book on teen suicide I'd recommend *Falling Into Place*, *The Half Life of Molly Pierce* or even *The Hate List*. This one is not a waste of time, it's just not all that compelling.

**Grade:** B Sam's best and only friend left behind a playlist after committing suicide, a death for which he feels responsible. Maybe, just maybe that list of music holds clues to the reason why Hayden overdosed. Sam's sure their argument was the reason, as well as bullying from Hayden's own

brother. But then he meets Astrid and her friends, starts coming out of his shell, and learns things about his buddy he never knew. Is finding new friends, and maybe even a girlfriend disloyal to Hayden? I had a hard time getting into *PLAYLIST FOR THE DEAD*, probably because I'm neither a video game nor music buff, Sam's two biggest interests. Once he started interacting with Astrid, her friends, his sister and her boyfriend, Sam became a much more interesting character and I embraced the story, but it was a slow start. The more I read, the more I liked Sam and I appreciated his strong moral compass. His sense of right and wrong helped him realize the strength he didn't realize he had, and he did grow as a character. Michelle Falkoff did a good job creating multidimensional characters, even the characters who seemed black and white had internal motivations of self preservation Sam hadn't originally understood. In the end, I liked and respected him. Falkoff captured the essence of a high school boy, a misfit who fit better than he realized. Themes: suicide, bullying, family, siblings, first romance, music, video games, depression, grief. *PLAYLIST FOR THE DEAD* is a very good book that will appeal to both boys and girls covering important social and mental health topics.

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