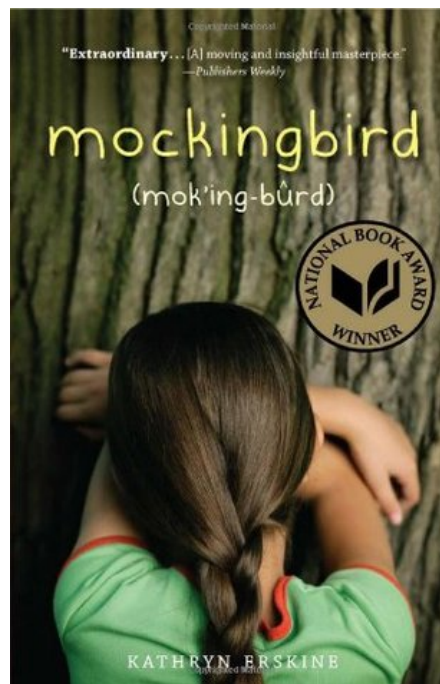




Mockingbird

Kathryn Erskine

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Mockingbird Kathryn Erskine

THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER and ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT NOVELS OF OUR TIME FOR YOUNG READERS

Caitlin has Asperger's. The world according to her is black and white; anything in between is confusing. Before, when things got confusing, Caitlin went to her older brother, Devon, for help. But Devon was killed in a school shooting, and Caitlin's dad is so distraught that he is just not helpful. Caitlin wants everything to go back to the way things were, but she doesn't know how to do that. Then she comes across the word closure--and she realizes this is what she needs. And in her search for it, Caitlin discovers that the world may not be so black and white after all.

"Powerful."--*Publishers Weekly*

"A strong and complex character study."--*The Horn Book*

"Allusions to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the portrayal of a whole community's healing process, and the sharp insights into Caitlyn's behavior enhance this fine addition to the recent group of books with narrators with autism and Asbergers."--*Booklist*

Mockingbird Details

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Author : Kathryn Erskine

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would want to do that too if I saw cuts on somebody's hands so I let him look.

'Do you still really want to do this?'

I don't know if he means to keep cutting the oak tree or work on the chest but I say, 'Yes,' just in case he means the chest.

'You think this will bring us Closure?'

I shake my head. 'No. I know it will.'

He blows a little air out of his nose and nods. He lets go of my hands and does one more big sigh. 'Maybe we can make something good and strong and beautiful come out of this.'

Good and strong and beautiful. I like those words. They sound like Devon. I want to build something good and strong and beautiful."

I'm surprised that I never wrote a review for this before, but apparently I read it last summer, when I was away from Goodreads, so consider this a catch-up. This novel is told from the perspective of Caitlin, a 5th grader with Asperger's, who has just lost her older brother to a random school shooting. In addition, her mother has died of cancer years before, so now it's just her and her father in the house, and her father is taking the loss extremely hard. Caitlin, however, is struggling to understand the changes that have suddenly taken place in her life, and in addition to having to make it through each day with her condition, she now also has to face the prospect of life without Devon, the only other person who truly understood her, and who made it possible for her to face the world. With the help of a school counselor, some new friends, and her father, Caitlin attempts to find Closure to the events that took Devon out of her life.

I love the narrative voice in this novel, respect the way Erskine treats a character with Asperger's, and appreciate the fact that the book makes me cry. Every time. I think this is a gorgeous book, that does tug at the heartstrings, but with the situations Caitlin is in, it's hard not to have moments like that. There are tremendous lessons in this novel, about empathy, friendships, and generally dealing with people who are different than us. It would be a fantastic novel to teach, and not just for the lessons about disabilities. Larger lessons can easily be drawn from this one. It's a fantastic book, and one of my favorites that I put on my YA syllabus for this semester. I just hope the rest of the class liked it, also.

Victor Almeida says

Como não abrir o maior sorriso durante a leitura desse livro?

Passarinha foi uma das histórias mais singelas, emocionantes e inocentes que eu já li — ela traz uma sinceridade impressionante. A protagonista, que sofre da Síndrome de Asperger, é retratada de forma incrível, e o seu ponto de vista é maravilhosamente bem escrito. Sem contar que dá vontade de abraçar ela pra sempre e nunca mais soltar. Eu AMEI ela do começo ao fim. A forma como ela lida com o mundo, as expressões que ela usa, suas dificuldades, tudo é muito delicado e encantador.

A trama e a narrativa são super simples, mas não deixam de te prender. É daqueles livros que apenas isso basta — mais ou menos que isso, estraga. O livro passa ensinamentos e te revela coisas da forma mais despretensiosa possível. É um livro lindo, que dá aquela esquentadinha no coração que a gente tanto ama.

Claudia Badiu says

Caitlin înva?? despre empatie, despre culori ?i despre prieteni în timp ce î?i caut? Împ?care. Toat? povestea mi s-a p?rut a fi încercarea unui copil fragil de a în?elege un labirint f?r? sens, numit via??.

Nicola Mansfield says

Reason for Reading: I have Asperger's and when I saw a book that featured a female protagonist with Asperger's I was elated and HAD to read the book.

I came away from this book very satisfied. As a female with Asperger's I felt that Caitlin was portrayed realistically. There can be wide differences in how males and females present and I think the author managed to bring those out in Caitlin, though the intense plot does put Caitlin in a situation above and beyond normal everyday life.

A small town has been devastated. The local junior high was hit by two gun wielding students who managed to kill one teacher and two students before the police shot one perpetrator and apprehended the other. One of the students who was shot is Caitlin's older brother, Devon. Their mother had died many years ago when Caitlin was a baby and Devon had really become her rock. He was a great big brother. He treated her well and knew how to deal with her as a person with Asperger's almost naturally. He'd tell her not to do stuff 'cause it wasn't cool or that people didn't like it when she did this or that and why and his advice helped her. Now Caitlin's world revolves around seeing a councilor daily at school, coping with her father's sudden crying sessions and missing Devon in her own way. People want her to be more emotional and show more empathy (traits those with Asperger's do not always appear to show) and Caitlin finally finds the word "CLOsure" and knows that is what both she and her father need.

The plot itself is well done. A small community coping with this horrible violence that has entered its once thought serene boundaries. The author shows the effect not only on the family of those murdered and the staff and students at the school, but staff at other schools, neighbours, and a boy who was the cousin of one of the killers. There is fear, disbelief, and togetherness but no anger as they bond to help the community as one, heal. Very-well done.

As to the Asperger's, from the author's note she does not outright say but it seems clear that either she or a loved one has an 'aspie' child and she is writing from experience. Caitlin is well presented as a female with Asperger's. The typical picture the public has of someone with AS is a science, math, computer geek and this is not wrong. These are often very strong interests in males (which doesn't mean some females will too) but typically females show their 'geekiness' in words and books. They are writers, bookworms, grammar police, etc. Caitlin here is an excellent student with great writing skills and a fascination with the dictionary, who keeps lists of words with the accentuated part in caps. Typical female AS behaviour. Caitlin has some meltdowns, fortunately the author doesn't over do them, as has been done in other books I've read. Girls are less likely to have seriously noticeable meltdowns and hyperactivity making the typical age of diagnoses around 16 rather 8 as in boys. Caitlin's two least favourite subjects at school are recess and PE. This really endeared her to me as those were my most hated subjects as well. There is this anxiety feeling you get in the pit of your stomach as an aspie and Caitlin associates this with recess so whenever she gets this feeling she will say she is feeling recessy or has the recess feeling. This beautifully describes an everyday symptom of Asperger's.

The main aspect the author emphasizes here though is the AS person's lack of ability to show emotion or empathy. I think Erskine does manage to show that while we do not show emotion it does not mean we do not feel emotion. Two very different points to keep in mind. Empathy is something that Caitlin herself struggles with and tries to understand and the whole book is a process for her in finding out how to show she has this to others and to understand herself, that she does. While many Asperger's people may lack emotion or empathy, I think the majority of us agree that we lack the ability to SHOW it, rather than that we do not feel the emotions or know how to feel them. I would also like to add my own bit of advice: Never **force** an Asperger's person to look you in the eye, it is akin to torture.

Anyway, I felt a lot of sympathy with Caitlin and the author in her ability to show a positive female character with Asperger's. My only negative is that **I** personally do not agree with the the medical methods being used to treat Caitlin.

Rita says

“ Eu consigo ler qualquer livro, porque o meu nível de leitura é tão alto que eles nem o conseguem classificar. Às vezes leio o mesmo livro uma e outra e outra vez. O que é bom nos livros é que o que vem lá dentro não muda nunca. Os livros não são como as pessoas. Os livros são seguros.”

Opinião aqui:

<http://clarocomoaagua.blogs.sapo.pt/o...>

C.G. Drews says

Ugh, I did *not* have a good time with this book at all. I read it because it's about a *girl* with Aspergers who go undiagnosed a lot due to stigmas promoting that boys are more likely to have it. (They aren't. Girls are more likely to go undiagnosed due to being able to blend in and imitate their peers better.)

ASD is a broad spectrum, but this didn't feel like a very accurate portrayal. The protagonist possibly had other learning disabilities? Because her thought process wasn't typically ASD at all. And *most of the people in my life* are on the Autism spectrum and NONE of them are similar to Caitlin at all. But like I said: spectrum. But there comes a time when a book feels like it's being written from how a neurotypical views ASD, not from what it is actually like to have ASD.

Caitlin also lacked huge ASD pointers, like having an obsessive interest (she liked drawing but wasn't obsessive about it) and she had no need for routines and no emphasis on anxiety. Also **the biggest insult is saying that people with ASD are not emphatic.** This is so untrue it breaks my heart. Oftentimes it's hard to show your empathy or it's shown in different ways, but the whole book was about Caitlin *learning to care about people* and it's just...it's a stigma and it needs to stop. The felt like an NT going "omg it must be so hard/bad to be ASD" and it was very ableist.

But that saying, the author's daughter has AS. So....yeah. **I had issues with its portrayal, but maybe that's just me.**

Obviously there are many perspectives and experiences. If you liked this book, then fine. But don't hate on me for my opinions and experiences.

NOTE: This review has been edited to more accurately summarise my thoughts and feelings at a later date.

(Also it's super hard to read a book when the character has my name. WEIRDNESS ENSUES.)

Thomas says

4.5 stars.

A moving story about an eleven-year-old girl with Asperger's syndrome whose older brother dies in a school shooting and the steps she takes to get closure. Kathryn Erskine pulls this poignant tale off wonderfully – it is sad, but sad in a way that gives the reader hope.

Throughout the novel I had to remind myself that Caitlin was eleven as opposed to five or six; this isn't a bad thing, and in fact it shows Erskine's talent for character development. To see her grow by learning about empathy and closure by the end of the novel was truly touching – I almost cried, but I finished the book while in journalism class, and crying in public isn't exactly socially acceptable.

I also loved the *To Kill a Mockingbird* parallels. It's one of my favorite books, so seeing the concurrent themes and similar characters in *Mockingbird* was an additional bonus.

Highly recommended for children, teens, and adults alike – this book is definitely deserving of the National Book Award, and will leave readers aching to understand one another despite their personal problems.

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Wendy says

One of my sisters loved this, the other didn't like it. I'm somewhere in between. I thought the writing was well-done: smooth and polished. But otherwise, I thought this was heavy-handed (the author's note is a sad muddle which kind of explains this) and very one-note.

Perhaps this is a small thing, but Devon's Eagle Scout project is a big part of the book, and it irritated me that what is described as his project would not earn him an Eagle--it just isn't big enough and doesn't include the required elements. I suppose it's possible that there's a wider scope to the project that wasn't described, but it doesn't really seem that way. He also would have been extremely young to earn an Eagle. (I assumed, until his age was specified and middle-school attendance mentioned, that he was quite a bit older--in high school--like the vast majority of Eagle Scouts.) While it isn't impossible--I have known of a few boys who earned the Eagle in eighth or ninth grade--it's unlikely. The boys I knew of had parents who were extremely involved in their kids' Boy Scout programs and pushing them regularly (or, in some cases, giving huge support to the boy's overdrive). The single dad in this book would not have had the time or (I think, based on what we see here) competitive drive to make it happen.

Tahleen says

As someone who has Asperger's, 10-year-old Caitlin has trouble understanding why people act a certain way and how to react to them in turn. She would always turn to her older brother Devon to explain things and situations for her, but Devon dies in a tragedy that rocks their entire community. So not only is Caitlin left without her most trusted friend and big brother, she must learn how to deal with the way her father is now acting, the way others treat her in school, learning empathy, and most important of all, getting to Closure.

If you haven't heard of this book yet, just to tell you, it won the National Book Award for young people's literature. And let me tell you, it certainly deserved it. Through Erskine's book we see the world through Caitlin's eyes and mind. She doesn't Get It (as she would say) most of the time, as she can't understand certain emotions or reactions. She has to work really hard to see how another person is feeling and how to make them feel better, instead of worse. It's very illuminating to see how a person with Asperger's might view the world, and gives us a tool to understand them better and the way they see things better.

Despite her lack of understanding others, Caitlin is remarkably intelligent and an incredible artist. Throughout the book, Erskine uses Caitlin's artistic talents as a device—her refusal to use color goes hand in hand with the way she likes to see the world. Black and white are much easier to deal with than colors that can run together and blur. But as she begins to learn empathy and friendship, as she begins to find the ever-illusory Closure, Caitlin begins to see that color might be useful.

What really struck me about this novel was the rawness and realness of everything. Erskine does not really censor much, but not in an inappropriate way. What I mean is, Caitlin just reports things as she sees them, bluntly and accurately—this is especially true when she describes her father's violent reaction when he hears the news of his son's death and his subsequent grieving (mostly detachment, refusal to speak of Devon, and lots of crying), and how she herself is dealing with the loss of the only person who seemed to understand how to talk to her. We also see things that Caitlin misses. She has incredible skills of observation, and doesn't shy away from telling us everything—actions and gestures that she doesn't understand are not lost on us, and I felt it all the more.

We also see the way a tragedy can affect everyone involved, even those who are related to the ones who caused it. It's heartbreaking, but the quest for Closure is a bold and valiant one that Caitlin tries to share with the entire community.

The Mockingbird title comes from Devon and Caitlin's shared love for the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Throughout, Caitlin keeps returning to this, to her nickname Scout that Devon gave her, and to all of their likeness to the three main characters in the film and book (Jem, Scout and Atticus). In the end, Devon is the symbolic Mockingbird—dead despite his innocence, but living on in the memory of his family and of his community.

Incredibly moving and poignant (I use that word not as a cliché; I mean it with all my heart), Caitlin shows us a world that we mostly try to ignore. She shows us ways to deal with grief, both good and bad, but all real; after death and tragedy, we must find our way to Closure, and to living again.

Cristiana de Sousa says

Aquele livro feito para nos emocionar! Gostei bastante desta história. Não conhecia muito bem os contornos da narrativa mas envolvi-me muito com as personagens. Adorei a Caitlin. A sua forma de ver o mundo é tao peculiar e fascinante ao mesmo tempo! Adorei que a história tivesse sido contada através dos seus olhos. Não estava a contar que o livro aborda-se o tema dos tiroteios nas escolas e apesar da autora o ter feito de forma subtil, acho que foi muito bem conseguido. A escrita da autora é simples mas muito emotiva, o que me

agradou bastante. Adorei simplesmente. Penso que é um livro indicado tanto para adultos como crianças. Aconselho e muito xD

Betsy says

Children's librarians read quite a few books for kids and the result is that we tend to want to discuss them with one another. Unlucky librarians are surrounded solely by people who agree with their opinions. You're much luckier if you happen to have a group of close folks around you who can offer alternate takes on the books you read and critique. Now, it doesn't happen every year but once in a while children's books (novels in particular) become divisive. Folks draw battle lines in the sand and declare that a book is either infinitely lovable and the greatest thing since sliced bread, or loathsome beyond belief, the words shaming the very paper they are printed upon. In the last few years such divisive books have included everything from *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* to *The Underneath*. This year, 2010, one particular book has earned that honor. *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine marks the author's second foray into books for youth (the first being her young adult novel *Quaking*). It has garnered a great deal of praise, from such notable authors as Andrew Clements and Sharon Creech. It has been nominated, as of this review, for a National Book Award in the Young Person's category. And I tell you truly, I'm afraid that it's a book that just doesn't do it for me. There are some great books coming out in 2010, but this is simply not one of them.

Caitlin doesn't quite understand. Her older brother Devon is dead, killed tragically in a school shooting. She understands that, of course, but she doesn't like what his death has brought with it. As a kid with Asperger's, Caitlin has a difficult enough time figuring out the world around her as it is. Now she has glommed onto a word that seems to offer her a way out her current unhappiness: Closure. If she can find closure for Devon's death, maybe that will help her, help her dad, help everyone who's hurting. The only question is, what can a girl like Caitlin do to help herself and everyone else as well?

Here are some of the criticisms of *Mockingbird* that I personally do not agree with. 1: That children will not pick this book up. Certainly they won't pick up the hardcover (the paperback sports a much nicer, if unfortunately trendy, image) due to the fact that it's just a blue sky and not much else. But if they begin to read, I can see them being sufficiently intrigued to continue. 2: That this is not an authentic view of Asperger's. I don't agree, partially because you do have to take each child on a case by case basis.

Here are some of the criticisms of *Mockingbird* that I personally DO agree with: First off, there is the fact that the book is attempting too much at one time. This is true. *Mockingbird* wants to be three different kinds of books all at once. It would prefer to be a book about a school shooting and how a community deals with the aftermath. This is the very first thing Erskine mentions in the Author's Note, so it appears to be the most important to her. The second thing it would like to be is a book about Asperger's. Done. Third, it would ALSO like to be a book about a dead family member. That's three different storylines. Three that in and of themselves would be more than enough for any middle grade novel. And I think that two of them together would have worked just fine, but by adding all three together Erskine overplays her hand. She relies on Caitlin solving not just her own personal problems, but the problems of an entire community. This rings false for the reader, and the novel's conclusion ends up feeling rushed and pat rather than true and heartfelt.

Which brings us to my second problem. When it comes to the conclusion of any novel, the reader needs to believe in it. If everything appears too pat, you lose something along the way. In the case of Caitlin, the closure is too clean. Right off the bat you have the question of why Caitlin is so obsessed with the nature of closure, not just for herself but for everyone. Compare this book for a moment to Alan Silberberg's, *Milo: Sticky Notes and Brain Freeze*. Like Caitlin, the hero of that book, Milo, is searching for a kind of closure to his mother's death. He is singularly self-obsessed, much like Caitlin, but his pain is his own, with some

understanding that his dad and sister must feel somewhat similar. When Milo finds a solution to his problem (finding and seeking out objects that remind him of his mother) it inadvertently brings him and his father together again. That, I could believe. Caitlin's belief that she needs to find closure for her entire community, though? Unfortunately, I felt manipulated by that sudden shift in plotting. It seemed necessary for the story for Caitlin to help her community come to terms with her brother's death, but I didn't believe for a moment that Caitlin the character would care about others in this manner. She goes from an inability to feel empathy one moment to becoming the most empathetic girl in the whole wide world the next. I didn't buy it.

The writing itself for the most part wasn't problematic. However, there were little moments when I found it getting a touch cutesy. After hearing Mrs. Brook tell her that she is convinced that Caitlin can learn empathy, our heroine slips off her shoes and touches her toes to the floor. "I pull my feet off of the floor and shove them back into my sneakers. At least I tried dipping my toe in empathy." That's a fair example of a couple points in the story where the text becomes a little too on the nose to feel real. It doesn't happen often, but there are moments.

The Asperger's I do not question because that is tricky territory. I do not have a child with Asperger's and Ms. Erskine does. However, this raises a fairly interesting point in and of itself. When Cynthia Lord wrote the Newbery Honor winning book *Rules* she made her narrator not an autistic boy, but rather his put upon older sister. This was remarkably clever of her. Then, when you get to the end of the book, the reader finds out via the bookflap that the author has an autistic son of her own. The book is therefore lent a kind of authenticity through this admission. As I read *Mockingbird* however, I found myself wondering if the author had any personal connection or knowledge of Asperger's that could lend the book similar authenticity. I read the bookflap and the Author's Note and came up with nothing. Nada. It was only through the grapevine that I heard the rumor that Ms. Erskine has a daughter of her own with Asperger's. Now why on earth would the book wish to hide this fact? By the time I reached the end I wanted to believe that the writer had some knowledge of the subject, but instead of including a list of useful sources, or even a website kids can check, the Author's Note speaks instead about the Virginia Tech shootings. A harrowing incident to be sure, but why avoid mentioning that someone you love has a connection to your main character? It made for a very strange gap.

Finally, there is Caitlin's voice. It drove me absolutely insane. Some have argued that this is a good thing. If Caitlin's voice annoys you then the author must be doing something right in creating a character that doesn't fall into the usual middle grade pattern of protagonists. She is unique. I note this theory, but I don't agree with it. My annoyance isn't necessarily who Caitlin is, but rather the fact that I never for one moment believe that I'm listening to a girl. Instead, for much of this book I felt like I was reading an adult woman putting herself into the head of a girl like Caitlin. How else to explain the off-putting "humorous" moments when Caitlin fails to understand a word or term? We have been assured that she reads at an adult level. Certainly her vocabulary should be through the roof, and yet she stumbles when she hits words as simple as "closure" and "fundraiser" (turning it into the strangely out-of-character "fun raiser"). It seems that Caitlin is only as smart as the plot allows her to be. Otherwise, she's adorably out-of-place, and that manipulation rang false.

Many folks have found themselves comparing this book to a fellow 2010 release, *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper. Like *Mockingbird*, Ms. Draper's book is a first person narrative of a girl dealing with the world around her. In Draper's story the main character has cerebral palsy, just as Ms. Draper's daughter does (and just as that book ALSO fails to mention anywhere). The difference for me lies in the characters. What I have found, though, is that many people dislike these books for similar reasons. Some people find *Mockingbird* charming and *Out of My Mind* manipulative. Others feel it's the other way around. Personally, I think that Draper's book is the better of the two, though Ms. Erskine is an excellent writer. I'm certain that in the future she will produce books that I will like to read. Unfortunately, in the case of *Mockingbird* the problems outweigh the positives. The book doesn't ring true for me, even if the writer is talented. Hopefully in the future we'll see more of her work but for now I'll be recommending books like *Out of My Mind* and *Milo* over others like *Mockingbird*.

For ages 9-12.

Melina Souza says

Que livro lindo e necessário.

Ele é protagonizado por uma garotinha e é voltado para um público mais infantil, mas o tema abordado é tão importante que acredito que deve ser lido por pessoas de todas as idades.

Nele conhecemos Caitlin, uma garota do quinto ano com Síndrome de Asperger, que está aprendendo a lidar com a morte de seu irmão (alguns anos mais velho) que sempre foi próximo dela, com o luto de seu pai e com seus coleguinhas da escola.

É um livro sobre empatia. Um livro que todos deveriam ler e passar a mensagem pra frente.
