



The Orphanage of Miracles

Amy Neftzger

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Perhaps everyone could use a miracle, but very few will find the one they truly need.

Amid a war torn land and hidden deep within an enchanted forest lays an orphanage where miracles abound. It's a magical place created years ago by a resolute king who must defeat an evil sorcerer waging bitter war against his land and his people. He knew that in order to save his people, victory would require a miracle.

A young girl named Kelsey also desperately needs a miracle. She sets out on a quest to find the whispered-of orphanage. Along the way she's joined by several traveling companions, including an over-sized snow leopard and a boy who cannot speak. In a land under a spell cast by the evil sorcerer, it's difficult to know the difference between what's real and what isn't ... and what a true friend looks like. Join Kelsey and her companions as they embark on an extraordinary adventure and a quest unlike any other and take a peek inside The Orphanage of Miracles.

The Orphanage of Miracles Details

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Author : Amy Neftzger

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From Reader Review The Orphanage of Miracles for online ebook

Leah says

Originally posted on LibraryThing

Rating: 2.5 of 5

*Perhaps everyone could use a miracle,
but very few will find the one they truly need.*

Amid a war torn land, hidden deep within an enchanted forest, hides an orphanage where miracles abound...Join Kelsey and her companions as they embark on an extraordinary adventure and a quest unlike any other.

Definitely intended for a middle grade audience, The Orphanage of Miracles fell short of an enjoyable experience for me; thus, the below three stars rating which I don't give out willy nilly. So let me explain why I did this time:

The strongest elements of the story were overpowered by the heavy-handed allegory. What do I mean by "heavy-handed," you ask? The author chose to tell, rather than show, 95% of the story. And she didn't just tell one time; the same character would think it then speak it, and then repeat it. Sometimes different characters would repeat the same questions and conclusions. At one point I thought maybe this was for the benefit of the book's audience (kids aged 8-10), you know, to make sure they knew exactly what was meant. But then, in a later chapter, Kelsey basically said one should never talk down to children because you don't know how old they really are on the inside. So I have to conclude the rampant "telling" and repetition was intentional.

Perhaps all that telling would've worked much better had the page count been reduced by a couple hundred pages? In its current form, though, it felt like a sermon, not a story.

And from the book's blurb (see above in italics) "miracles abound" was misleading. I quickly discovered that miracles were rare at the orphanage and the kids (as well as their mentors) didn't even really know what miracles were or how to create them.

Here's what I liked about The Orphanage of Miracles:

- * The title.
- * The cover jacket design.
- * The illustrations.
- * The Memory Shoppe. Though memories as a tangible object wasn't new to me, I enjoyed how the author played with that concept.
- * The overall tone of the book was an uplifting one.
- * The themes. Constructive lessons and morality abound.

Overall, I closed the book and felt the story just flat out missed its mark. So much potential, solid writing skills, fresh idea...lost in all that darn *telling*!

I'll be donating this one to my local library.

Shelby says

This is a cute fantasy/pre teen book. I had fun reading this. Loved how the two stories came together. The characters were great.

Beverley says

I received a free copy from NetGalley. I'm glad to see there are now more, as this very much read as the first in a series. Some decent messages about choices. The magic isn't too crazy or unbelievable and it strangely fit in very well with people seeing/not seeing truth/fiction with the current political climate.

Chris says

Even though the high level premise felt similar to other books, The Orphanage of Miracles caught my attention with the subtle variety in the plot. The story takes place in an unknown medieval land where magic is real and an evil sorcerer has waged war against the people and king. Seems like a pretty mundane synopsis. The difference comes with the idea of the Orphanage of Miracles. Not much is told about this Orphanage other than that it exists as a mystical place somewhere in the land where miracles are somehow manufactured. I immediately thought of Miracle Max from The Princess Bride, but after that imagery died down, I gave the book a chance. The book has two main stories working to meet one another.

A girl named Kelsey has left her home on a quest to find the Orphanage of Miracles. There's a disaster in her home town and she's determined to help if she can. She's not thinking about the bigger picture of getting a miracle for the entire land as a way of ending the war. As she travels, Kelsey meets some interesting characters who both help and hinder her journey.

Meanwhile, a parallel story is presented. The reader finds out that the Orphanage DOES exist but something isn't quite right. We follow the life of Nicholas, a young orphan inside the Orphanage. We learn that the orphans each assigned a different specific job or calling to perform. Nicholas and his friends have had bad luck trying to find their perfect calling but they are excited because their new prospect involves working directly with the creation and cultivation of Miracles. As Nicholas's story progresses, it becomes very clear that there are major problems at the Orphanage. The entire Orphanage is shrouded in mystery both from the outside world and even to those living and working inside its walls.

As the story progressed, I saw a number of moral allegories presented. Some were more veiled than others. I think for the intended age range (grade schoolers, probably maxing out at middle school), the symbolism and suggestions may be subtle enough to be interesting ideas without being overt commentary on ethics or other moral issues. I personally found the messages to be refreshing in their veiled subtlety as a way of helping present some thoughtful ideals for children to digest.

There were a few times where I felt like the editing could have been tightened up again. The biggest problem I felt was that the mystery was perhaps a bit too obtuse which could lead to unnecessary confusion. There were a lot of elements that were left very vague or completely undefined. I saw this as a core plot device to keep even the nature of the mystery intentionally ambiguous. This became problematic during the last few chapters of the book when the revelations came flowing out with such rapidity as to be a little disorienting. Still, this imbalance was acceptable in light of the length and nature of the story.

I really enjoyed the light tone and writing of this book. The presentation of the story and the mystery were both compelling and easily accessible for young readers. I didn't initially know that this was the first book in a series. The book ends with a nice conclusion that wraps up a lot of the core mysteries and issues with the story but it also opens up a compelling new plot that I'm genuinely interested in following up in the next book. Overall, this is a nice, light read with slightly deeper themes and ideas lingering just below the surface.

3 out of 5 stars

Naomi says

Read my full review: <http://bit.ly/1hTnRbK>

My opinion: I have had the pleasure of knowing Ms. Neftzger for several years. She has been a Sisterhood of the Traveling Book author member. Her books have always focused on adult literature and while good, her literature didn't really stand out to her competitors.

My opinion of this author changed when I read The Orphanage of Miracles. This book grasped me immediately. It is a wonderful, CLEAN read for middle school readers, which allows them to use their imaginations with the storyline. Although there were two stories "going on", the story wrapped up beautifully.

One criticism that I did find focuses on the editing of the book. I feel that it could have used some tighter editing. I found several mistakes which should have stood out to an editor. However, these errors didn't detract from my review rating.

As a result of her author member status, I have read numerous works by this author, but feel she has really found her niche in this series and in the juvenile book market.

Jaime LH says

The Orphanage of Miracles is a middle grade novel that can best be described as an allegory. A magical alternate world is used to create metaphors and impart many lessons: doing what is right, the importance of cooperation, working hard, thinking for yourself, and not believing stereotypes. All of these messages are wonderful, especially for a middle grade audience, it is the way the messages are imparted that I take issue with.

We follow two main characters: Kelsey, on a journey to the Orphanage to gain the means to save her village from economic ruin; and Nicholas, a resident of the Orphanage who struggles to create the miracles the place

is known for. Of the two narratives Nicholas has by far the more compelling one. His experiments and observations, along with those of his friends Maggie and Jovan, have a wry humor that makes for a great reading experience. The three children have distinct characteristics and ways of viewing the world, and their friendship holds the narrative together even though all other characters are underdeveloped.

Kelsey's quest narrative on the other hand is burdened with too much talk and not enough action. It primarily consists of Kelsey receiving lectures by a series of people as she goes on her way. There are a set of three sisters whose only purpose is to stand at various locations and deliver unsolicited criticism to our heroine. The bulk of the middle of the novel is given over to a talking leopard named Megan literally delivering moral lessons interspersed with cryptic statements. Kelsey is told not to do something, does it anyway, is punished, as as she learns from it Megan is there to tell her what she should do and point out where she went wrong. Maybe it's me, but I found this entire section of the story extremely tedious. Maybe I'm too far outside the intended audience to appreciate it, maybe it's because I like my character growth to be better integrated into the story and not so by the numbers.

The novel has some interesting imagery and ideas, the lessons it imparts are valuable, but ultimately I felt that it was bogged down by a need to explicitly sermonize. The deus ex machina doesn't help either.

Recommended for: children age 9-12 who enjoy fantasy and don't mind a slower story.

Ally says

I won a copy from Goodreads First Reads.

The Orphanage of Miracles is a strange, but wonderful read. It's not confusing, but it is befuddling and mad, in a good way. Told from two POVs, The Orphanage of Miracles is full of delight for the Middle Grade Audience.

The plot was good. It's uniqueness and spunky craziness enchanted me from the beginning. With twist and turns and crazy lessons, the plot will be confusing and maddening, in a good way, of course. Full of mystery and strange sisters and snow leopard, The Orphanage of Miracles is a nice surprise. The setting is much more surprising. In a cursed world of a kingdom where right is wrong and wrong is right/ truths are lies and lies are truths, characters and readers will experience a maddening world of a conflict, directly caused by a battle between a king and an evil sorcerer.

The ending of the Orphanage of Miracles was so surprising. Major cliffhanger at the end.

Kelsey is on a quest for a miracle. She sets off with a funny and sweet snow leopard and a mute boy, who Kelsey calls Silence. She journeys off to find the legendary Orphanage of Miracles, hoping to save her village from all sorts of problems. Kelsey is a huntress with a beautiful, in Kelsey's mind, knife. She's broken inside, but she doesn't know it. She's grumpy and rude most of the time, but mostly because of Silence, the mute boy. The character change of Kelsey is amazing and huge.

Nicholas is at the Orphanage of Miracles. His Orphanage orders him and others to make a miracle, but they don't tell him how. With a heart of gold and a mind of selflessness, Nicholas makes the first miracle in a long time. He's determined to find out why the Orphanage of Miracles only has autumn, why the guardians are so

odd, what do the words on the walls of the orphanage mean, and why are the guardians so obsessed with plants. As a naturally curious boy, Nicholas seeks answers from the insides of the Orphanage of Miracles.

The two POVs of Nicholas and Kelsey switches every chapter until their paths finally meet and intertwine.

Rating: Four out of Five

-Alice of Wonderland

Ameya says

A wholly believable new world

AmyNeftzger creates a totally believable new world. I was hooked right from the start. After all, who wouldn't want to create miracles, right?

“The Orphanage of Miracles” is divided into two points of view that you know will merge into one.

The first storyline involves the protagonist, Nicholas, Maggie and Jovan in the Orphanage. How they came to be there is a mystery to them. They are under the guidance of the kindly Taro, with the instructions to manufacture miracles to help the King to win the war against a sorcerer. The children are in puzzlement as they are given no rules or instructions on miracle-making, and are told that in fact no one has ever made a miracle. However, the garden they glimpse outside the Orphanage is crammed to the full with miracles, like singing fireflies and a fall that never turns into winter.

Hovering at the helm of the orphanage are the mysterious and rarely-seen Mr. and Mrs. Pontiff. The only semblance to the real pontiff that I could see is their belief in miracles, that they run an ancient institution and that they are almost never seen by the common person. (LOL). Otherwise, this is not a religious or Catholic book. The miracles are those that probably most children the world over believe are possible.

The second strand involves Kelsey, an irrepressible young lady, who leaves her parents to cure her village of its dire poverty. In search of a miracle and sources of food, Kelsey leaves the security of home alone with only a few dollars and nothing she can protect herself with if the wolves happen to spy her. This thread is a traditional quest story and we follow Kelsey along a variety of landscapes: a desert, the sea, and so on.

There is an amusing and perceptive scene early in Kelsey’s adventures where she enters a Memory shop. Instead of buying a happy memory as most people would, Kelsey happens upon jars with bad memories. The shopkeeper tells her, “People who want to be better and do great things” would want to buy these. This spurs Kelsey into thinking that bad memories would help her to accomplish something miraculous. So she spends a large proportion of her meagre funds to buy the largest jar of bad memories she can, and immediately comes under their spell in an unexpected fashion. It is humorous how she is ridded of their dire shadow.

Similar in style to the Narnia chronicles, Kelsey is helped along by a magnificent, huge snow leopard called Megan and a mute orphan boy she calls Silence. They meet with another fellow traveller called Roland, but who or what he is, I will leave a mystery in order to encourage you to read it.

In true fable fashion, there are many nuggets in the writing, which never comes across as being didactic or dull. “The worst kind of brokenness is the kind that you don’t know you have.” There is also humour, and

sometimes wisdom is found in the humour, e.g. Megan says, “There are many things I wish I couldn’t smell, but very few things that I am physically unable to smell.”

So to the question of what is a miracle and how to discover one: is it something to be mined or discovered or manufactured in a lab? What does it look like? It is possibly something like a shooting star or an element made up of a flash of light and colour. We do learn that miracles are individual to the receiver. So while no gospel is expounded, miracles are left largely undefined.

This is an amazing story – a fable, a quest tale, an orphanage story, a fairy tale – you name it, and it is stupendous. Well-written, interesting and miraculous – a great package. The ending leaves room for a sequel.

Christa says

A refreshingly original story of young people who aren't afraid to think outside the box. It's hard not to relate to Nicholas and his friends, who are expected to come up with results without being given instructions. I was intrigued by the story from page one, waiting to find out how it was possible to manufacture a miracle.

Kelsey's story took longer to pull me in, but as she learned to care for others, I too cared for her. I would definitely recommend it, and I intend to look out for the sequel!

Sharon Tyler says

The Orphanage of Miracles by Amy Neftzger is a unique middle grade novel about two very different journeys that come together to help the land. A sorcerer has tried to conquer the land cast a spell that makes it difficult for people to see things as they really are, and many are coming to believe that the war between their king and the sorcerer is not real. There is an orphanage within an enchanted forest in which miracles are protected while its residents strive to create more. Nicholas, Jovan, and Maggie are three orphans striving to find answers while not getting into trouble for their efforts, and struggling to figure out the process of miracle creation. Kelsey has left her family in search for a miracle, the orphanage might just be her answer. An her journey she is joined by a silent boy and a snow leopard. As the story toggles between Nicholas and Kelsey readers get a look at the interior of the orphanage and Kelsey's journey there. Will anyone find the answers they are looking for, or will they discover that they have not been asking the correct questions?

I was in a reading slump, where everything seemed to just seem blah or the same as everything else in its genre. However, The Orphanage of Miracles and one other book I recently finished broke through that feeling. This story might seem like the basic fantasy quest story, a young girl leaves home to seek help for her village only to discover that the larger world is not what she expects, and the companions she gathers on her way are equally as unexpected. I greatly enjoyed the characters, and the repeated tableaux that helped Kelsey grow and become more aware of the bigger picture. I also loved the juxtaposition between Kelsey's journey and the interior quest of Nicholas, Jovan, and Maggie as they seek answers in an environment that seems to prefer ignorance. Their answer seeking is just as challenging in some ways as the physical search by Kelsey.

I highly recommend The Orphanage of Miracles to readers that enjoy epic fantasy, coming of age stories, and novels that are simply well done and far from a cookie cutter tale. Readers of the middle grade set and older will enjoy this book, particularly if they enjoy fantasy or action adventure stories.

Stephanie Cover2CoverBlog says

I won this Middle Grade book from Librarything Early Reviewers program, but I heard about it while I was at BEA in May and I was not really sure what to expect of it. I have seen that it has gotten some lower (3 star) reviews online and the back of the book did not have a synopsis, only this:

“Perhaps everyone could use a miracle,
but very few will find the one they truly need.”

I happily grabbed this book off my shelf on a day I knew I would be spending in Panera to get some reading and blogging done and in front of the fireplace with a cup of coffee I dove in. I was whisked away by two enchanting and adorable stories of children: the first of an Orphanage and three orphans whose goal it is to make or catch a miracle, because that is what the orphanage does, it is in charge of miracles for the king; and the second of a girl on a journey to find a miracle for her starving village and family during wartime.

As the story progresses you learn many things, like to question how things are and why, how to have courage and take ownership of your misfortunes and misdeeds, to not fear death but embrace it, and that sometimes you need healing even when you do not realize it. The story is jam-packed with little messages to the reader about self-worth and loving others and how miracles can and do happen but only to those who allow themselves to share experiences with others.

Nicolas, Maggie, and Joven are the orphans that we follow at the Orphanage of Miracles. Nicolas is the soft-spoken, good with instructions (when he gets them), thoughtful one; Maggie, the aggressive, out-spoken, brass one; and Joven the intellectual one, who questions a lot. They are moved from ‘job’ to ‘job’ at the orphanage in the attempt to have miracles appear, however the staff never tell them how to do anything, just send them off.

Kelsey’s story is that of adventure, she is traveling to find a miracle and has various companions join her trip, including a mute child that she dubs ‘Silence’, a talking leopard, a fox, and a king. As she travels she learns more and more about herself and the real journey she is on and it is a lot of fun.

I found myself loving the Orphanage storyline most at first but then wanted more of Kelsey’s story, it was a very good balance, I think.

I recommend this book to young readers; I think they will love it. However I also think it is a great read for anyone, there are a lot of hidden and not-so-hidden messages throughout it and I really enjoyed the depth behind those messages.

Jen Lamoureux says

I really wanted to enjoy this book. I like the story. The central idea that's there has a lot of promise. However, I think the book itself could benefit from a few things. First, another round of editing. There are some clunky bits that could be cleaned up--particularly, the overly expository style of the beginning of the book could use some work.

I was intrigued at the beginning because the author does a good job of setting up a mystery for the reader. I enjoyed that. However, as the book progresses, the pacing just makes the whole thing feel monotonous and as though it's too long.

What adds to this is that the author is very heavy in telling, versus showing. Also, I have a lot of difficulty figuring out the ages of the characters because their characterizations are sometimes inconsistent. There's a lot of repetition in the book. That may be for the benefit of its younger intended audience; however, I think some children might have difficulty finding the patience to read this all the way through to the end.

Then, you get to the end... and it's a little bit too preachy for my tastes. Great messages, mediocre finish. There will apparently be more books in the series. I'd like to see where the story goes, but I can't say I'll go out of my way to find the next book.

Jaylia3 says

Myth-like fairy tale for preteen set

Written as a myth-like fairy tale and aimed at preteen readers, *Orphanage of Miracles* has a nice stereotype flip--the main girl character is strong and fearless while the main boy character is compassionate and level-headed. A faraway war is making life difficult for everyone and the king is missing, so children living at an orphanage hidden within an enchanted forest are given the job of trying to create a miracle to set things right. In another part of the kingdom a young girl named Kelsey leaves her home also in search of a miracle to end the war. Until the storylines come together at the end, chapters alternate between the quest like adventures of Kelsey as she travels and the struggles of three orphan friends as they try to create a miracle using library books and laboratory equipment. There are some wonderful magical elements in the book, like bottled memories that can be bought and sold. *Orphanage of Miracles* should appeal to children who enjoy magic-filled stories set in distant lands.

Tabitha says

A serious quest with a silly journey to a place made for miracles, *The Orphanage of Miracles* was a zaney read that kids will enjoy. It was full of nonsensical things that of course made complete sense!

Everyone knew that the orphanage had an enchanted forest on one side, but no one seemed to know exactly on which side it was located. Every time someone identified where it was, it seemed as if that part of the forest moved somewhere else. – pg 2

The description aptly tells you everything you can expect down to the key characters. It is a story however, mostly told from two perspectives: that of Nicholas (a boy who lives and works in the Orphanage of Miracles) and Kelsey (a girl in search of a miracle). I expected a very traditional high fantasy setting but instead it was this strange mix of modern and fantasy. The land is magical and things are strange but then there are frequently references to things from our world. There were a few times where I was like “that is so spot on” – for instance:

It's a Monday. We all know that there are no miracles on Mondays. – pg 5

It's fine that things from our world were regularly referenced because it allowed easy comparisons, but I did find myself wishing it were fully fantasy. Still it was full of magic and magic of course is always loads of fun!

Seeing magic would be more like personally knowing the artist instead of just looking at the sculpture the artist has made – pg 2

There are several types of journeys that I feel “questing” fantasies frequently fall into. The Orphanage of Miracles is very much the ‘annoying bratty character coming of age and growing into a better person’ type. Personally, I’m always tormented when I read this kind of fantasy because I find it very hard to enjoy reading when I want to constantly slap the main character. Kelsey is one of those characters, she was full of herself, annoying, self indulgent, and always looking for the easy way out. That is all part of the point and necessary to this story and thankfully as far as quests go hers was a super enjoyable one to read!

Quests are a huge inconvenience. Don’t let anyone tell you differently, even if that person has experience. The problem is that people forget the pain and aggravation as soon as the quest ends successfully, and then they remember only the glorious parts. In this way quests are a bit like childbirth, even to the point of saying that quests often give birth to glory. Maybe. – pg 13

Now, Nicholas was the total opposite of Kelsey! He was a wonderful child and I couldn’t get enough of him. I found myself wishing more time was spent in the Orphanage of Miracles and less time following around Kelsey. I loved the idea of making miracles and all of the crazy ways they tried to make them, catch them, grow them...you name it and Nicholas and his friends Jovan & Maggie were trying it.

I love the witty and snarky characters of Meghan the Snow Leopard and the Sisters of Wisdom. There was another female character, Maggie – that I felt was rather similar to Kelsey. They read like much the same person, what with their snappish behavior. But there was just this undefinable something that made Maggie pleasant and likeable where as Kelsey was not. I still assume this was the intention since you get to start liking Kelsey at the end as her character grows.

This is a scene that made me fall in love with Maggie:

“How is destruction beautiful?” He asked in a challenging tone. “You may think that a broken egg is ugly and messy,” she answered, “but the cake it goes into is beautiful and won’t hold together without it.” “Eggs don’t get blown up. They get broken.” “You’ve never seen me bake,” she replied with a smirk. – pg 37

I have but one complaint and it almost nearly made me knock my review down 1 star. It was the very last chapter. But I can’t fault a book so much for just one chapter – no matter how much it got on my nerves, especially since I loved the whole book except those last 10 pages. I felt the entire chapter was way too much “explaining all the things that don’t need explaining” – 10 pages worth of that! – it was done in the wise teacher to the unknowing student style. Where everything down to the simplest concepts were explained and I hated that. I feel like it belittles the reader as well as the character in the story, because all of this information the reader has already gathered along the way while reading the book. So it was just a rehashing of everything that you know by this point already. If I could I would condense that whole chapter down to

one page and it would have had so much more impact.

Ultimately, there was so much to be loved in The Orphanage of Miracles and I would recommend it to any pre-teen for a fun read about going in search of what you want, but instead finding what you need.

Caren ~ the misfit geek says

Leopards and foxes and kings, oh my. This magical adventure in, to quote the author, “The Land of Make Believe,” is very well done. It is books like this that gave me my love of reading as a child. It engages the imagination from start to finish.

I loved the characters in this book. The girls are strong and brave and the boys are kind and compassionate. They are interesting, curious, and generally likeable. The lessons they learn during the story are clearly relevant to their lives.

The book is made up of two separate stories that merge in the end. It alternates between the two but the common thread is evident all the way through. The end sets up nicely for the sequel, which is not yet released.

I would definitely recommend this book to the targeted age group as well as to adults as a fun and engaging read. Kudos to Cory Basil for a fabulous cover and illustrations. Although I usually try not to compare authors, I have to say that Amy Neftzger’s writing reminds me a lot of Neil Gaiman, who happens to be one of my favorite authors. I am planning to read, not only the sequel to this book, but other works of this author.
