



The Demon Headmaster

Gillian Cross

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On Dinah's first day at school she senses something is wrong. The kids work even during playtime, and are neat and behave well but what is the secret of the Headmaster's control over them, and why are they afraid?

The Demon Headmaster Details

Date : Published June 3rd 2004 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published 1982)

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From Reader Review The Demon Headmaster for online ebook

Merwa1 says

The demon headmaster is a very spooky book that will captivate children from the start. Dinah Glass starts at a new school and finds it to be very out of the ordinary. None of the children play typical games in the playground; they just stand around in circles, memorising multiplication tables and dates of kings and queens of England. Her two new foster brothers seem very nervous of the Headmaster and she soon finds out why when she meets him herself. Tall and thin in his black gown, with white hair and black glasses, he isn't a very comfortable character to spend any time with. This unnatural and odd atmosphere is enough to allow children to explore a very strange setting where their imagination will truly unravel. Suitable for children aged 9-10, this magical and mystique adventure will allow them to explore the world of hypnotism and investigation-something that will really get them thinking. The descriptive language is effective for increasing vocabulary as well as creating a very intriguing scene where children can pick up on various emotions. This book would be great for learning about the tone and atmosphere a book can create. The sinister feel will surely open up a new world of writing for children.

Emily says

Dinah Glass starts a new school where things are very strange. The children act in a robotic and unnerving way, seemingly lead by the strange, fierce and intimidating headmaster. Dinah begins to suspect that something is not quite right in the school, particularly surrounding the headmaster. When she voices her concern to her peers they all reply with exactly the same phrase, 'the headmaster is a wonderful man...' The story unfolds and Dinah finds that her suspicions were correct, this is no ordinary school.

I read this story when I was in Year 6, and found the book equally compelling and unnerving. Now I can see how social injustices are brought up in a way that is accessible to children. For example, the 'perfect' prefects are bullies and kick over Dinah's sickly step brother in the snow; it arises deep hatred and knowing for right and wrong in a child. The underlying story was also quite original at the time, the idea of hypnotism to create a 'perfect' school is creative and interesting to an upper key stage 2 child.

Michelle Keill says

I haven't revisited this classic since I first read it in the 80s. It is certainly as good, and as creepy, as I remember. Unlike my 80s self though, I did feel some sympathy towards the Headmaster, and feel that if he were in charge of running Britain rather than the current 'coalition' government, the country would be in a much better state. And if the Headmaster was in charge of schools today there would be no texting in class, smoking, etc, etc. Just good old fashioned Learnin' Stuff. With a bit of mind control thrown in.

Geena says

Gillian Cross' "The Demon Headmaster" is the first novel in the Demon Headmaster series. Dinah Glass is a young, orphaned girl who is taken in by the Hunters, a sweet family with two boys close to Dinah's age. Upon her arrival, Dinah soon learns that the two boys, Lloyd and Harvey Hunter, have strong feelings of

discomfort regarding the school in which they attend. Through further conversation, Dinah gathers that the main target of the boy's animosity is directed towards the school's Headmaster. Dinah is enrolled at the same school and quickly comes to understand that something is not quite right; all of the children are prim, proper, and utterly perfect. They do not make mistakes, they do not play, scream, or fight, and they carry out their day-to-day activities as demanded by the omniscient Headmaster, in a very precise, robotic manner. Dinah realizes that there is an insidious underlying reason for the children's pathologically perfect behavior, and sets off determined to find out exactly what it is. Without getting into "spoiler territory", the story examines the cost of individual freedom at the hands of absolute perfectionism. Cross' narrative is insightful, intelligent, and deliciously creepy, perfectly highlighting the evil that lurks behind comfort and conformity. Though marketed as a children's novel, "The Demon Headmaster" can be enjoyed by readers of any age who like their fantastical horror stories sprinkled with bits of poignant existentialism.

Livash Ramduth says

My second review is of Gillian Cross's story, The Demon Headmaster. This story is largely set in a school environment which is ideal in allowing students to utilise their imaginations as it's a setting they are familiar with. The story follows Dinah Glass, a new student at school, and she finds it a very strange place right from the start. The children seem different; the games they play aren't those that Dinah expected. In fact, the children seem to spend play time just memorising facts and reciting time's tables.

Her suspicions are only further raised when she meets the headmaster. He is described in great detail as a character that isn't too comfortable to be around. During her first meeting, Dinah is informed that she fell asleep however she knows and feels that something is not quite right. Dinah begins to get more and more suspicious and begins to ask questions, however her fellow students all answer in the same controlled fashion when prompted, as if under a spell or something. Dinah instincts tell her, undoubtedly, that something is wrong, so she sets out to find out what's going on. In her attempts to discover the truth she tries to win the confidence of her two step brothers (Lloyd and Harvey) to help her investigate the strange occurrences at the school. Dinah discovers with the help of her friends that the headmaster has set out to hypnotise the school (students and teachers). Helping her were her friends who were the only students who immune to hypnosis like she was. However, she was the driving force they needed actually investigate the weird occurrences. Eventually, Dinah and co discover that the headmaster had bigger plans, plans to hypnotise the entire country via the means of a TV programme.

I think this is a great book aimed at the older primary school students (year 5 or 6) and it is very powerful in getting children to use their imagination and develop a new image of a setting they are so familiar with. The great detail used in describing characters, events and settings is a great example to fall back on when teaching children about descriptive writing.

Carina says

'The Demon Headmaster' by Gillian Cross is an exciting story that both boys and girls would enjoy. It is the first of a series of books based on Dinah's war with the headmaster of her school, who uses his powers of hypnotism to try to take over the whole country through television. Dinah and her gang named 'SPLAT', who are immune to the headmaster's powers of hypnotism, plot to stop him. This book is suitable for children of 9 years and above, because of the theme of hypnotism which may be slightly frightening for younger children and because of its reading level.

As a teacher, this is not the sort of book I would use as the basis of a topic because obviously it would be

inappropriate to emphasise the idea of a demon headmaster. However it has a place in the reading area or library of a school, as children can all relate to the school theme and its a story that would excite their imaginations. The third person narrative is subjective, it allows the reader to hear Dinah's (the main protagonist) thoughts and feelings on events and allows them to get closer to the emotions of the main character, whilst still being distant enough to relate to the other characters. This could be why the book appeals to both boys and girls despite the main character being female. This and obviously the fact that the title character is male and quite scary.

'The Demon Headmaster' also includes themes such as fitting in, making friends, foster care and different families which relates to PSHE. This is a story that I read as a child and thoroughly enjoyed, the fact that it stuck in my mind is why I decided to review it. It bridges the gap between children's books and adult novels with its descriptive passages and characterisation, yet is fairly short so the reader will not be too daunted by it. I think this is a story that all children would enjoy and would support children to continue to read for pleasure at a stage where particularly boys sometimes begin to lose interest in reading, looking on it as perhaps a mainly female preoccupation.

Matthew says

Second Review: 4th July - 5th July 2016

So, this is a pretty famous series, but it's also very average. Not too say I didn't enjoy myself or Gillian Cross' crazy tale of hypnosis in an eighties' English comprehensive school, but the characterisation isn't brilliant and the writing middling. However, for its target audience I do recommend and if you wanna check it out too, it's all good!

First Review: August 7th 2014

On the surface, The Demon Headmaster is a ever so slightly depressing, creepy book about a hypnotising, evil headteacher with plans for world domination. However, delve deeper, and you may find Gillian Cross has raised some important issues (social control, about the fact that the music we listen to, the television programmes we worship and the books we read influence our daily lives in more than one way, and about discipline and creativity... Slightly unnerving for a simple, short children's book.) that indeed are influenced by Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, referenced several times within the pages. And as for its quality? It's okay. It's memorable, certainly with its secret messages, but its writing style feels too childish for the subject matter. Maybe another children's author could've have portrayed the ideas better.

Miriam says

...and by Demon Cross really means Mean and Scary. There are no actual demonic entities, and no souls are eternally damned in the making of this book.

In fact, it isn't even very scary -- rather unrealistically so, given the premise. I mean, imagine you are little kid at a new school. Your new foster brothers drop ominous hints and are clearly afraid of the headmaster and other students. On your first day, all the other kids are strangely regimented and won't speak to you. You get physically manhandled by the precepts, and then dragged to the head's office. Afterward you can't remember what happened. Likewise, think about life for the two boys: every day they go to a school where they are shut in a room while all the other zombie-like children conduct some secret activities. The slightest misbehavior leads to physical abuse, such as being forced out into the snow for an extended period with no

coat or gloves. Their parents absolutely refuse to listen and insist the school is wonderful.

The scenario is nightmarish. In execution, it comes across as merely stressful and slightly scary. In real life a child in these conditions would probably have a break-down or at least display some weird behavioral disorders. But I guess they are English or something so they are keeping their chins up or whatever. There isn't enough character development to be certain.

Anyway, it is a very short and slight book, an entertaining quick read that doesn't contain anything graphic or too frightening for younger kids. If you found this title looking for something actually demonic or scary related to school, try *The Dead Boy Detectives*, *The Dreaming*, or *Evil Librarian*. (The last is the most infernal but the least scary.)

Praiz Sophyronja says

I read this in 2005/06 over and over again! I just stumbled onto it on my TL. Damn, this is so nostalgic...

Tom Hubbard says

Good.

Csy says

I first picked up *The Demon Headmaster* when I was in Grade 2, and of course, my grade 2 self loved it. It contained everything... suspense, supernatural, action, and most importantly, an evil villian that was easy to relate to. I mean, it's not uncommon for a 7/8 year-old to have dreams of world domination.

It's been quite a few years, and this book has been imposed onto me as a compulsory reader. The following is written from my current perspective.

Firstly, I have to say that I didn't enjoy this book as much the second time round. The plot was rather well developed, and I credit Gillian Cross that, but various characters lacked dimension. I couldn't really justify their actions, and to a certain extent, it contradicts with the initial image presented.

The idea of supernatural abilities such as hypnosis in order to achieve the aspiration of world domination isn't that original and having been exposed to many more similar books, I would say that the motives of the villain (The headmaster) are rather bland and honestly, making a speech in a TV show probably wouldn't be the best way of achieving it. If the SPLAT members couldn't be hypnotized, wouldn't there be much more people around the world who were immune? Not all citizens would be watching the show – would this method really be that effective? And if it's not, then how smart is the Headmaster, exactly?

I would rate this a 3, however it bears certain significance to me as a 2nd grader. I guess I was intrigued by the series and completed it, and would recommend this for younger readers. Taking the target audience and everything else into account, I guess a 4 would be a justified rating.

Quinkling says

This was one of my favourite books (and television programmes!) when I was growing up. I found a copy in a charity shop and couldn't resist rereading it. It's just as good as I remember, if a little dated in places. The children are wonderfully idiosyncratic and real, and the Demon Headmaster fabulously scary.

Suzanne Dia says

It IS for children, which is probably why I didn't like it much, the main idea -about an evil headmaster..etc- is nice, but in general, it wasn't to my liking.

But I think kids would enjoy it, I like the questions in the school contest thingy, although I couldn't get any of them, lol.

And Black banana how I like cursing using food instead of other bad words XD

Kate B says

Oooh, that feeling you have when you know when something is seriously wrong but can't quite put your finger on it...

I must look out for the others in the series (I hadn't known there were more when I read this in 1984).

Somerandom says

I think this book surmised my feelings of my own Headmaster lol!

The series stars Dinah Glass, later Hunter, as she comes to discover her new school might not be that normal after all. She soon teams up with The Society for the Protection of our Lives Against Them, also known as "S.P.L.A.T." A group of children who, for some reason, are immune to the Headmaster's mysterious powers.

These include the de facto leader and organizer Lloyd Hunter. Who can be a bit arrogant and sometimes jello of anyone stealing his thunder. But is ultimately a capable leader and is not actually as stupid as he first seems.

The laid back Harvey Hunter. Who, despite being the complete opposite of Lloyd, is very close to his brother and often keeps Lloyd off of the Headmaster's radar. He is also the first to accept Dinah and seems to understand her better than most.

Ian, Lloyd's right hand man, although is very much the joker of the group and like Harvey is rather laid back.

The level headed and somewhat Motherly Mandy, who is quick to soothe Lloyd's temper and is the most mature of the group.

And the Youngster Ingrid, who is generally ignored because of her age and is prone to sulking.

Anyway, Dinah happens to be highly intelligent, which catches the attention of her Headmaster, much to her dismay. This means he tends to use her as a pawn in his possibly nefarious schemes. Complicating matters, Dinah is the only one of the group who is not immune to the Headmaster's powers.

Together with her new found friends, Dinah must uncover the secret of her school, defeat her Headmaster (without getting expelled! lol)and hopefully win over her new foster family.

This is an engaging story, with likable characters and a pretty relatable perspective for kids.

I'd recommend it to the kidlings.
