



Close Your Pretty Eyes

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Eleven-year-old Olivia has been in care since she was five, and is just beginning her nineteenth placement. Her new home is a secluded farmhouse, centuries old, where she slowly bonds with her foster family. But the house holds dark secrets. Olivia discovers that it was once a notorious baby farm, where unwanted children were left to die. She becomes convinced that the place is haunted. She is desperate to save her new family from the ghosts. The danger is real - but does it come from the twisted mind of a very disturbed child?

Close Your Pretty Eyes Details

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From Reader Review Close Your Pretty Eyes for online ebook

Katie Wynn says

Honestly, I have to say that Olivia was really annoying and that it was her fault that she kept getting thrown out of foster cares. But overall, this book was really good.

Rhi says

I found this book really really good to read. It had thriller aspects, dramatic aspects and emotional heart strings being tugged chapters. It was a very very very good book, i sat for hours reading it today, it was just wonderful. I liked it being written from a young persons perspective, it made it easier to read and understand where she was coming from. I liked the chapters going back in time periods as well, i usually hate books that do that, but it was easy to follow and i felt by the end of the book like i personally wanted to adopt Olivia. Shes a troubled girl, its clear she has mental trauma and illnesses, but i loved her character non-the less. Sally Nicholls did a fantastic job!

Charlie says

Trigger Warning: Discussion of physical, emotional and verbal child abuse and its aftermath. Descriptions of PTSD, including flashbacks and dissociation. Nothing graphic.

Oh. My. God.

I wish I had written this.

Olivia's mental space is so brilliantly crafted. She has PTSD, and her therapist says she has symptoms, but she says they are superpowers. Because being able to hear things others can't hear is good, and always being aware means she can see things coming, and she can almost read minds because she's so good at reading people.

She thinks she's evil. I think she's a manipulative little shit of a child who is *so incredibly logical and justified* I want to foster her myself.

She has flashbacks, and they merge with seeing/hearing ghosts, because they are all linked together in ways she has to protect herself. Babies crying remind her of her mother. She's scared of the dark. She rules all her old foster homes, because she will not take anything lying down.

Here, have a quote:

I only had to open my mouth to start screaming and he'd pick up the book again. I sort of liked that I could get him to do what I wanted, and I sort of didn't, because the sort of dad who can be outsmarted by an eleven-year-old probably isn't smart enough to protect me from all the people I need protecting from.

and another,

I thought I really might kill him. I could do it, I bet. [...] They wouldn't be able to send me to someone like Violet if I killed Jim. They'd have to put me in prison. Violet couldn't get me in prison, and I bet no one else would either. I'd be the eleven-year-old murderer, and no one would dare do anything to me in case I killed them.

and another,

"Careful on the stepping stones," they'd say. "Or you'll get eaten by alligators!"

When I first met them, I didn't realise they were kidding. I thought we really *were* going to get eaten by alligators, and I couldn't understand why everyone looked so cheerful about it. When I figured it out, I got pretty annoyed. Here I was working hard to keep Hayley and me safe, playing nice so they didn't dump us, watching and listening all the time, so when they started hitting us, I wouldn't be taken by surprise. And they'd had me worrying about alligators and Darth Vader.

This is why this book is brilliant.

It's harsh. The ghost story is so satisfying as an expression of Olivia's issues, her wants, and her mental distress. (It's probably less satisfying as an actual ghost story. I wasn't quite able to put on my childish headspace and see what younger!me would have thought.)

This might be one of those books best appreciated by children's librarians, because the layers when you can see them as an adult are *fantastic*.

I just love these characters and want them to be happy, and as much as I know they are fictional, I know there are far too many realities in this book for me to be comfortable. It makes me want to become a fucking awesome and dedicated foster mum.

Luna says

It only took Sally Nicholls one page for me to love this book, the very first page when Olivia says something went wrong when she was born. She was born evil she believes which is why her mother hated her. These are only a few paragraphs but already I wished I could fix her life.

I read this book in one sitting and I will admit there were tears threatening to escape rather frequently. Now, while I loved Olivia I didn't always like her, at times she's really awful but that makes her so believable. She's angry and pushes people away because if there is one thing she's learned is that no one ever stays. I know what that's like, so to me Olivia was utterly convincing as a character.

Olivia believes she has super powers, which is why she hears the ghost in her new home and nobody else can. She can't sleep because it's not safe. Between Olivia's emotional minefield and the events at the house you really are in for an emotional roller-coaster.

Close Your Pretty Eyes had a good story but it's Olivia that makes this book wonderful.

Sophie says

Close Your Pretty Eyes is the story of Olivia, an eleven-year-old girl who has lived in numerous foster homes after being taken away from her abusive mother. Her sixteenth home is an unusual one: an old farmhouse that was once home to the notorious baby murderer Amelia Dyer. Olivia starts to see and hear strange things and it soon becomes clear that Amelia may still be around, and it looks like she has dark intentions...

This book easily gets five stars just for how brilliantly written it is. Sally Nicholls is an incredible writer who seems to have a superhuman ability to really get into the heads of her characters and the world that they live in. Olivia's story is truly harrowing and she is also a very interesting character, especially given her unreliable narration.

Don't let the cover fool you - this isn't really a horror book. Although the ghost story ties the book together, overall it has a lot more in common with the likes of Jacqueline Wilson than with Stephen King. It's a window into Olivia's life in care and how being abused has affected every aspect of how she thinks and acts.

The only problem with this book for me is something that I think is purely down to personal taste: it's so realistic that it doesn't really seem like a story. I often find this is the case with more literary books. I just really wished that the ending could have been a little more conclusive, and offered just the tiniest bit more hope. (I felt exactly the same with Sally's previous book, **All Fall Down** - easily one of the best books I've ever read and the most upsetting!) Although in general I'm a sucker for the big happy ending, I'm perfectly fine with sad endings too. All I ask is - not to be patronised by being told everything will be alright when it won't be - but for that little grain of hope. Neil Gaiman's paraphrasing of GK Chesterton's quote is so important to me: "Fairy tales are more than true. Not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." When I read a story in which the dragon can't be beaten, I at least want to see that there's a chink in its armour...

Anyway, like I said, I think that is a matter of preference, and I feel it would be wrong to deduct points for it. This is a dark, atmospheric, affecting and important book and it will stay with you for a very long time.

Suz Korb says

This book is not for the faint of heart. The main character is a mentally damaged child and we experience the story through her underdeveloped sense of self. There's no holds barred in this book. Olivia suffers constantly, makes others around her suffer, and physically harms herself. The ghost story adds even more horror to the mix and I think this author knew the killing of babies and children made sure the story was as disturbing as possible.

Rhian Ivory says

Close your Pretty Eyes is a brave and bold book because the protagonist is immediately dislikeable and at times difficult to identify with. However each of her actions are fully explained and justified through Sally Nicholls's clear character development and Olivia's backstory. Olivia becomes, as a result, an authentic protagonist who happily doesn't undergo a Disney makeover at any point, but instead she stays true to herself. The ghostly subplot about baby farming was also carefully constructed and added an intriguing historical and paranormal element to the novel heightening the atmosphere as well as raising the stakes for

Olivia.

Adriana Robinson says

Very emotional

Adele Broadbent says

This heart breaking story is told in the viewpoint of 11 yr old Olivia. Each chapter is focussed on a period in her short life, or people that have fostered her. The reader discovers along the way why Olivia has had 16 foster homes, primarily because of her own shocking, rebellious, destructive behaviour. But these behaviours are all safety mechanisms she has built in defence of the hurt and betrayal she has experienced along the way. Eg. When she misbehaves, steals, spits, lashes out with words or fists, she knows she has done wrong and will eventually be moved to yet another foster family. Not being able to cope with the stress of waiting to be told she is losing another family, she acts appallingly to speed up the process and the anger. This stems from living with her real mother who was like living with a time-bomb, slowly ticking and anger building until she lashed out at her eldest daughter Olivia. Olivia would pester and annoy and get angry herself until her mother did the hitting and yelling and got it over and done with. When Olivia moves to Jim's place, out in the country with his own two children and another foster teen and her own baby, Olivia is keen to settle in. But then she asks who the photo of the scary old woman is on the wall. It is a convicted and hanged Victorian babykiller.

I thought the ghost sub plot to this story wasn't very strong. But the writing from Olivia's point of view, and how she expressed her anguish and anger through the separate chapters about different parts of her 11 years of life was excellent. So sad, but so true for so many children.

Bev says

Not easy reading the things poor Olivia has been through so far in her short life but a very sensitive moving account of an abused child, moved from home to home.

Caren says

I saw this book recommended on a blog about children's books and I had read another book by this author, so I decided to give it a try. It is very well-written, but is quite sad. The eleven-year-old protagonist is mentally scarred by having been abused by her real mother as well as a foster mother, and then shuttled from foster home to foster home. Her defense is to behave as impossibly as she can. It does give you a respect for people who foster children. It can't be an easy job. There is a little ghost story laced throughout the plot, but the real focus is on the difficulties of being a child who perceives herself to be unwanted and unloved. Truly heart-breaking! The ending is inconclusive, so you will think about and wonder about Olivia even after you have finished the book.

Beth Bonini says

Sometimes the rating system feels very inadequate. I didn't "really like" this book in the sense of having a pleasurable reading experience; in fact, it was an almost horribly painful book to read. However, I still feel obligated to give it four stars in order to acknowledge that it does a number of things really well. First of all, it is extremely "readable" and I could hardly put it down after the initial chapters. Although the content may not be emotionally appropriate for many children (more on this), the writing style is -- with simple sentences, vivid descriptions and great control of the flashback scenes which inform the present action. Second, the first-person voice of Olivia is strong, consistent and emotionally affecting. Olivia is an abused child who has been in and out of many foster care homes. The author deftly weaves her former experiences into her present situation, in order to show how her damaging past has shaped her responses to what could be a promising present. Third, the author has really done her research and it shows. There is a very well-balanced portrayal of the "care system" -- with both good and bad carers, and good carers who are also not up to the task of parenting such a damaged child.

The novel begins with Olivia being taken to live with the Iveys: Jim (father), Daniel and Harriet (his children) and an older fostered child called Grace, who also has a baby called Maisy. The Iveys live in a large, rambling period house in the country, with fields and animals. Despite her deeply rooted mistrust and many, many fears, Olivia has a cautious liking for the Iveys -- but she cannot seem to stop or manage her bad behaviour. Although Olivia has only a partial understanding of her own behaviour and emotions, the author does a fantastic job of balancing out Olivia's perception of the world with an insight into how others (her former foster parents and her therapist) see and understand her.

After a promising start with the Iveys, Olivia becomes fixated on the ghost of Amelia Dyer -- a Victorian baby farmer who had once lived in the house, and was responsible for the murder of a number of babies. (Amelia Dyer was a real person, although the Ivey's house is a fictional place.) The inclusion of this ghost story element is mostly successful, I think. In some ways it is distracting, and I wonder if the author included it because supernatural horrors are a bit easier to cope with than the very real horrors of life as an abused child? (The creepy gothic elements of the book are certainly played on in the marketing of the book, when it is actually more of a realistic "problem" novel.) At any rate, Olivia's fears of the dark, or being alone, of being rejected or even done away with all become heightened as she becomes increasingly convinced that she is being haunted by Amelia Dyer. Even worse, the ghost wants her to do bad things and is acting through her. As with many children's books, the story is working on two levels. I can see that a younger child may be taken in by the ghost story; an adult will read it all more metaphorically.

Olivia's self-destructive tendencies are probably entirely realistic, but they are very difficult to read. Perhaps some children will enjoy the way she plays out and manipulates authority; I don't know. She deliberately hurts the people who actually care for her, and ends up hurting herself in turn. Perhaps some young readers will have a "lightbulb" moment of understanding when they see how Olivia undermines herself? I wouldn't really recommend this novel for the truly tender-hearted or sheltered child, but tougher children -- who have experienced more difficulties in life, particularly with inconsistent and inadequate parents -- may really respond to it.

Sally Flint says

This wasn't the best book ever. It was easy to read but for me the story just didn't work. The main character is an eleven year old who believes she is evil as she has been rejected from so many foster homes etc. The problem is she behaves badly to preempt any disappointment. The actual issue of the hurt done to her is convincing, but the attempt to link it to the discovery of a ghost in final house she stays in is much less

convincing. There is a temptation to say 'same old same old' with the exploration of a troubled childhood, but that would be unfair. It is almost though as if that part isn't for a young audience at all. It reads a little bit like a case study. The structure is inventive but the plot doesn't gel, overall disappointing.

Hnin says

It's a good horror story.

Megan says

4 stars

Nicholls took a sensitive subject which most authors don't write about and added a paranormal twist to it which made it even more unique. Olivia's keen sense of everything around her was an interesting ability to explore and the story behind it was heartbreaking. Plus, with the addition of an old portrait of a creepy women, I found myself on the edge of my seat.

Although this book may be classified as "middle-grade", I still enjoyed it for what it was and I liked that Nicholls didn't go out of her way to tone-down what could have been seen for 11 year olds as spooky. However, as this was aimed for a more middle-grade audience, I sometimes felt that the descriptions where very bland and not as good as they could have been.

Olivia annoyed me at times as well. If I don't consider her background, I would see her as stuck-up, rude, obnoxious and spoiled but seeing as she had previously been abused and labelled as a "devil child", I can be a bit more lenient. But she seemed to think that being told she was evil meant she had to act like a brat and do the opposite of what everyone told her to do. Rather than this annoying me, it made my sympathise for Olivia and how confused, lost and angry she was.

My main problem was that the other characters, namely Jim and Daniel, weren't as whole as I would have liked. I liked both of their characters but they just didn't seem *real* and that's one of the things I look for in a book.

Overall, Close Your Pretty Eyes was a very good book with some minor character development issues.
