



Words By Heart

Ouida Sebestyen

Download now

Read Online 

Words By Heart

Ouida Sebestyen

Words By Heart Ouida Sebestyen

Lena can recite the Scriptures by heart. Hoping to make her adored Papa proud of her and to make her white classmates notice her "Magic Mind," not her black skin, Lena vows to win the Bible-quoting contest. But winning does not bring Lena what she expected. Instead of honor, violence and death erupt and strike the one she loves most dearly. Lena, who has believed in vengeance, must now learn how to forgive.

Words By Heart Details

Date : Published January 1st 1997 by Yearling (first published 1979)

ISBN : 9780440413462

Author : Ouida Sebestyen

Format : Paperback 176 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Young Adult, Childrens

 [Download Words By Heart ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Words By Heart ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Words By Heart Ouida Sebestyen

From Reader Review Words By Heart for online ebook

Kristin says

I think my expectations were too high considering how much I enjoyed "The Girl in the Box" by this same author. This book did not hold my interest nearly as much. It was a decent read, but...it shouldn't have taken me as long as I did.

This is the story of Lena who learns about prejudice after winning a scripture-reciting contest at her school.

Abby says

Lena wants to be accepted and exceptional in a culture that resists giving her a place in their society. She strives for recognition, and she fights for what is right. The book gives us some simply beautiful scenes and themes. I loved when Lena and Winslow recited from John 14, alternating the verses, like a song--a beautiful moment. And then the theme of loving your enemies, told in such a poignant way. It's a beautiful story.

K. says

Didn't want to take a break from my Trollope and enter the world of YA again, but this will be the first review of 17 YA books a friend gave me to review for possible entry on her "girl's books" list (as in, a companion to my boy's books list).

Cons:

- 1) LAME baking metaphors (the baby was asleep, spilling over mother's arms like untrimmed pie crust??)
- 2) Couple of swear words
- 3) REALLY hard subject for younger readers
- 4) Not super original nor well-written

Pros:

- 1) Great message (forgiveness, non-violence, understanding)
- 2) Not just for girls, any kid could and should read books like this
- 3) Well done overall
- 4) Had some really great moments, ideas

1910 and things were really hard for a black family in a new, western town. Girl thinks things are going well. Not really. Boss kicks out a white, lazy man and fills his place with black, industrious man. Can you see where this is going? Black father killed (and it was not an easy read--not that that can be). Girl finds him just before he dies. Agonizing little bit there.

That was the short of it. I wouldn't give this to under 10's--just because the subject is painful and I'm not sure younger children have the understanding necessary for that yet. But I would give it to any kid to read, just to lend a little understanding to the age and the troubles that were (and are). I'm not sure it is the best book on the subject, but it was decent.

To JB:

I'm not sure it belongs on the list because I'm not sure a girl would pick it up voluntarily. Not many books are chosen at that age because you know it will be good for you and you know you will cry! It would be a good book to share (i.e. mother/daughter bookgroup or something). It wasn't well-written enough to be thought of as "the best," and I'm not sure it is a must-own, just a good idea to pick up from the library sometime.

Dayna Smith says

A touching story of a black family trying to make a new life amongst a white population in the early 1900's. Lena thinks that by winning the Scripture recitation contest she will finally have others notice her for her abilities rather than the color of her skin. After winning the Bible-quoting contest she finds it doesn't bring her the attention she expects or wants. After violence breaks out, Lena, who believes in vengeance, must learn to forgive. This book does use the "n" word as it was used during this time period.

Karen says

Family read aloud. Hands down 5 plus stars. The character of the father was just truly amazing and the way that he has just the right words when his daughter needed them is something I pray for with my own children. I cried for a solid 15 minutes while trying to read the ending aloud to my kids (more than I did with Stone Fox!) So many nuggets in this book that will go in my common place. This is a story we chose to read in the summer so we can compare with the movie. Moma needs some time before she can attempt the movie :)...krb 6/12/18

Tara says

Re-read this for the first time since middle school. Noticed its lack of subtlety this time around. The 12yo narrator had unrealistically canny insight into her own life, which made her less of a living character and more of a vehicle for the story's themes. The over-explaining is slightly more forgivable since it's a children's book.

There were some great parts though--maybe she just needed a better editor.

Sonila says

“Words by heart” is a story about an African American girl named Lena who moved with her family to the south to start a new life because they wanted to avoid being discriminated. She entered a bible quoting contest because she wanted her family to be proud of her. But she doesn’t get what she expected. Instead, Lena loses the one she loves the most so she wants to rake revenge, but she already made a promise that she wasn’t going to break. I really liked this book because it teaches people that everyone will die at some point

in life and that you need to forgive people even though they don't deserve to be forgiven.

Hina says

I read this book in 6th grade and I remember it like yesterday. This book took my young six-grader-emotions for a ride. I was furious one moment and crying the next. It's a simple read which is why I enjoyed it so much as a 6th grader. Could I have been as Lina was? I don't know. I learned then that books can really take you places. I can honestly say that from the moment I read the last page of 'Words By Heart', reading became fun.

Tuong says

It is impressive and moving about the waves of life. Lena was a poor little girl, who lived with hope and the pride of her father. Their family was moved from the South for avoiding the discrimination and starting the new life, but the hardship did not let them go. They must struggle with it and contempt from the folks. They are too small and, the burden of this world was too big. Lena's father was injured dead from facing with a white folk. Leba wanted to revenge, but having her father's wish she had learnt to how forgive them.

Jean says

I was shelving books and came across this little book that had somehow wandered far away from where it was supposed to be. I'm so glad. What a beautifully written book about love and forgiveness. Chris you may be inspired or discouraged by the fact that it took the author 35 years to get published. Those of you who are easily bored by my ramblings (that should probably include all of you) may quit reading now, because I have a lot of lovely quotes from the book that I want to include for my own selfishly personal future perusal.

Favorite Quotes:

"Nobody's better than anybody else. The Lord has a special need for all of us, or we wouldn't be here. But the thing you want to strive for, always, is to be better than yourself. And we all fall short on that."

"The work wasn't hard--her tiredness was different from field-work tiredness. The strain came from feeling two ways about everything. It was more like being in a war without knowing for sure who was your enemy or your friend, or even what you were fighting about."

"Then she knew why Papa was patient. He looked at everybody. He really stopped and looked, and saw inside."

"'Nobody needs to be defended,' Papa said, 'Just understood.'"

"It had been so easy, when she was little, to grab him around the neck and paste juicy kisses on his face to say she loved him. But now, just when he opened up his heart and his grown-up world to her with so much love of his own, she couldn't do it. She didn't know why. Some kind of instinct, maybe, saying, If I went on loving you like that, I'd never leave, I'd never ache for anything else...She hoped he knew, in his grownness what her feelings were."

"She couldn't ever imagine being as old as Papa. Forty was forever."

"Since mankind began, it seemed like, one group always banded against another group that lived or looked or thought differently. Putting the different ones down to make themselves seem higher."

"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Give to him that asketh thee. The words that had

been so beautiful to say, so easy, turned to stone. No one had told her, not Papa, not the preacher, that they could change like that when they had to be lived, and crush her with their weight."

"She couldn't love him. But she loved someone who knew how to love him, and that was a beginning."

Stephanie says

I read this back in the Summer of 2005. I wanted to read it because it was on the Summer Reading list. I remember it was a good book. There is a movie made but I didn't like the movie as much as the book.

Kathy Runyon says

This book was gut wrenching. The characters were well written and the truth taught in the pages of this fictional work flies in the face of today's conventional "wisdom" about racial issues. This book will challenge you deeply. Worth every minute that I spent reading this great story.

Bryon Butler says

Words by Heart turned out to be a wise, sad, wonderfully written YA novel by a writer I had not heard of but was glad to discover. Written about Lena and her blended black family, living in Texas in the early years of the 20th century, it captures an historic moment after the exodusters of the century before but before the great migration that led thousands of African-Americans north in search of a better life. The novel puts mention of President Roosevelt next to discussion of the White Man's burden, and sees the world through the eyes of Lena, the smart protagonist, victim, searcher who has a deep love for her father and a desire to make something of herself. A theme of the novel is suffering and promise, as shown in the repeated words: "Something always comes to fill the empty spaces".

Ouida Sebestyen, whose brief biography shows her to have been a frustrated author who found success when she turned her pen to youth and from the "wrong-sized" people, sure can write. Take for example Lena's discovery of ragtime music:

Her body surged to its glad beat. It had so many things in it.

it strutted and tinkled like someone in fancy clothes, too proud to admit to loneliness. Somewhere behind its throbbing strength,

a sadness hid: cities gray with cold, and people on trains, remembering home.

Then up it surged again: ain't nobody going to put me down. Listen, this is my life beating,

you hear it? This is me, saying things you never heard before. Move those feet. Accept it all.

This is what happy is. (p. 67, June, 1996 paperback edition).

Prevalent is the ongoing, and deepening, tragedy of racism and its consequences. It paints it crushing, but not destroying, the African-American family, while juxtaposing their character, both deeper and better, against the limited, vain, short-sided white characters that impact them. The novel does this convincingly and makes its point by crafting a well-written, gospel-influenced story that is neither contrived nor spoon-fed to the reader.

At the end, Lena and Winslow see beyond the cultural limitations imposed on them by society, and one is

grateful for this nugget of understanding, these points of light, that find a place in the ongoing blight of racism that has, and continues to impact, Texas and the other 49 states.

Michelle says

Rec. by Ann Voskamp. Vowing to gain her father's approval and her white classmates' respect by winning a Bible-quoting contest, Lena, an African-American girl, is horrified when her success brings violence and death to her home. Christian content is strong but not overwhelming or overly simplistic.

Lola says

Okay, so here's a theory I've been working on: schools are secretly conspiring to turn all children against reading forever. And why do I think this, you may ask. Well, I'm going to tell you. Because teachers wouldn't assign such mind numbingly boring books without knowing the consequences. For example, a close friend of mine was recently assigned *The Odyssey* for Honors English. This friend usually enjoys myths from all cultures, but this was just too much for her in such a short time span. It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that it totally changed her opinion of mythology. What I think is the fault with the way English is taught in schools today is that they're trying to teach literary elements rather than a love of literature. Literary elements aren't that important when you leave school, but a love of literature is. Adults wonder why some kids hate reading books when the answer is right in front of them. Kids don't read because that's what school indirectly teach them to do. This is not a hate-on-schools-and-English-teachers rant. I usually enjoy most of the books I read in English, and my English teachers have always been encouraging. Still, the majority of good books I've read in my life I've had to find on my own without any guidance. My parents aren't exactly the literary types, and I doubt my brothers have read anything since high school. I'm the bookworm of the family.

And so now that I've bored you with a rant and useless information about myself, I'll get on to my review and why that first paragraph was relevant. I wrote all of that because I was assigned to read *Words by Heart* in middle school, and it wasn't something I enjoyed. The major contributing factor had to be that I read it in school and therefore dissected it until there was nothing left. (Another thing I hate about English. They dissect things to the point where the words hold no magic for anyone anymore.) After all those quizzes and tests on this miniscule 135 page book, I was sick of it. And let's not forget the snail-speed rate we were forced to read it at. Two chapters were do a week. I could've finished this in one sitting. Reading so slow definitely took away some of the fun in reading this.

Of course, there is also the fact that I didn't even enjoy this to start with. It's really just a subpar historical fiction book aimed for elementary and middle school students with low reading levels. I'd passed this level by the third grade when I read the unabridged version of *Little Women* to win a reading contest. There was just nothing left for me to enjoy. The characters were average and the issues overdone if not still realistic. There was a nice twist at the end, but even that wasn't enough to revive this novel. In other words, it was perfect to teach a bored middle school class.

Recommendation: Don't read it. Hopefully, you won't ever have to read it for school.

