



The Wonder of Charlie Anne

Kimberly Newton Fusco

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Charlie Anne is devastated when her father must go north to build roads after the Depression hits. She and her siblings are left with their rigid cousin, Mirabel, and a farm full of chores. The only solace Charlie Anne finds is by the river, where the memory of her mother is strongest.

Then her neighbor Old Mr. Jolly brings home a new wife, Rosalyn, who shows up in pants—*pants!*—the color of red peppers. With her arrives Phoebe, a young African American girl who has also lost her mother. Phoebe is smart and fun and the perfect antidote to Charlie Anne's lonely days. The girls soon forge a friendship and learn from each other in amazing ways.

But when hatred turns their town ugly, it's almost more than they can bear. Now it's up to Charlie Anne and Phoebe to prove that our hearts are always able to expand.

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The Wonder of Charlie Anne Details

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Author : Kimberly Newton Fusco

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From Reader Review The Wonder of Charlie Anne for online ebook

Elisse says

I thought the book started off slow. Once I kept reading this was certainly worth the wait! Great main character with a huge deal of courage

Tracey says

This was a really beautiful read. I bought it last year in Mystic, CT, and only just got around to reading it. The writing and storytelling are unique, and gorgeous, and very true to life. I loved Charlie Anne a great deal. I loved the magical realism woven into the book. I love found families and how people grow and change, and the author did a beautiful job with it. It's just so good.

Sandra Stiles says

Charlie Anne's life has just gotten harder. First her mother dies in childbirth, and the baby also dies. Her cousin Mirabelle moves in to help her dad. Since it is the 1930's and the Great Depression is in full swing, her father has decided to leave her and the other children in the care of Mirabelle while he and his oldest son leave to work on President Roosevelt's roads. Mirabelle makes Charlie Anne do most of the chores, then chastises her for not being more lady like. Then their neighbor Mr. Jolly takes a new wife name Roselyn. She is bright and vibrant. This is enough to set tongues to wagging. The big shock is the young girl Roselyn has adopted. She is a young "colored" girl named Phoebe. Charlie Anne doesn't care what color she is. Unfortunately the rest of the town does, especially her cousin Mirabelle. Charlie Anne learns first hand how prejudiced people can be, yet also sees for herself, when she and Phoebe become friends, how stupid prejudice is. Great Book.

Yekta says

This book was very good and had sad and exciting parts. I liked his the author explains phoebe in the book. Everyone ignores her and some people stare at her, but Charlie Ann sees it in a different way

Sandy says

I think when I see lemon drops, I will think of Birdie in this book. Birdie is Charlie Anne's youngest sister and this girl can make a lemon drop last forever. Lemon drops are a special treat so Birdie only takes a few licks of her beloved sweet and then she folds it up in her hand and she saves it for later. Times were hard after the depression and Charlie Ann's family is struggling to survive. Dad is trying to take care of his five children on his own and the farm is barely making it. With promises of a job, dad sets off with the oldest boy leaving the younger children behind with their cousin Mirabel. Patience is running thin in the household with

father gone, as the children and Mirabel don't see eye-to-eye. One of the neighbors brings home a new wife Rosalyn, and that sets off some sparks in town. Rosalyn arrives in long pants, along with a young African American girl who is about the same age as Charlie Anne. Its small town gossip at its finest as town folk start their rumors regarding this new family. Charlie Anne thinks she might have a new friend but not if Mirabel can put a stop to it. Charlie Anne needs her father now more than ever and the town is split with the addition of these new individuals. A great book with lots of love, adventure and drama inside.

You have to love Charlie Anne approach to life, she's proud and she's bold but she's still just a child. Telling her father how she feels, taking a stand with Mirabel, hanging out with Phoebe and her experiences in school, they are all good examples on how lived. When she goes to the river to talk to her mom and then the way she talks to the animals on the farm it's as though she really does have this special touch, and that these things/people are actually conversing and responding to her. I loved these conversations. If you have not heard of Charlie Anne or read about her family, I highly recommend you read this book. I found it to be a quick read perhaps that was because I could not find a good place to stop.

Renee says

Summary: In a 1930s Massachusetts farm town torn by the Depression, racial tension, and other hardships, Charlie Anne and her black next-door neighbor Phoebe form a friendship that begins to transform their community.

RI author!

Ed says

Fusco, Kimberly Newton. (2010). *The Wonder of Charlie Anne*. New York: Random House/Knopf. 266 pp. ISBN 978-0-375-86104-8 (Hard Cover); \$16.99.

Charlie Anne's mother has died and now her father is taking her brother Thomas far from home to build roads. The depression is forcing many families to sacrifice. Charlie Anne has eaten potatoes about a hundred different ways. Charlie Anne will be staying with cousin Mirabel who attempts to civilize her by reading to her from a manners book. When Old Mr. Jolly takes a new wife, one who wears pants, red pepper pants, Charlie Anne thinks she may have a friend. However, Rosalyn has an adopted daughter, Phoebe and Phoebe is a Negro. Mirabel won't even think of allowing Charlie Anne to associate with this family. The final straw is when her Aunt Eleanor from Boston takes her younger brother Peter to live with them, all the while making it clear that they have no need for girls. Charlie Anne, however, will just see about any attempt to turn her into something she is not! As in the *Ninth Ward*, reviewed above, the distinguishing characteristic is the voice of Charlie Anne. Writers who attempt to depict conversations between dead people and the living often sound, of course, stiff and unnatural. Fusco's skill is that when Anna May and Belle, the cows, comment on the events in Charlie Anne's day or when Charlie Anne hears the voice of her mother moving across the river, she makes these voices seem natural and appropriate:

“When I get myself settled, with my back lying up next to Anna May and my eyes feeling all happy to be

filled up with the sight of my beautiful Brown Swiss Belle, that's when the two of them tell me how very sorry they are that I am having enough troubles to fill a wheelbarrow." (p. 105)

"When I get to the river, I am out of breath. I go up and sit by Mama and rest for a minute, and I tell her about my awful day, and she tells me she already knows about it all, but I can tell her some more if it will make me feel better." (p. 32).

Fusco waltzes between issues of race, poverty, education, religion, and politics with skill and without ever having any of these issues muffle the voice of Charlie Anne. It is no accident that Charlie Anne mentions the book, *Huckleberry Finn*—she is definitely Huck's twin sister. Purchase this one for middle school and high school libraries.

Mrs. Bruno says

This was a good book about the struggles of a family during the Depression. I found it to be very slow in parts, but the story was definitely one worth reading!!

Margo Tanenbaum says

Kimberly Newton Fusco's new novel, her second book for young people, introduces us to the spirited Charlie Anne, who narrates this unforgettable story of family, friendship, prejudice, courage, and vinegar pie set in a small town during the Depression.

Charlie Anne's mama has just died in childbirth when the story begins. Her "new mama," come to take care of her and her four siblings, is her cousin Mirabel, who showed up with all her suitcases and her no-nonsense manner to take charge of her Papa and her whole family. Charlie Anne is saddled with all the domestic chores, from doing the wash to making vinegar pie, and only can escape when she visits the nearby river, where her mother is buried. At the river, Charlie Anne tells her mother all her news. Times are hard, with luxuries like lemon drops so precious that the kids take a lick and put the candy back in their pocket for later. But when Charlie Anne's beloved Papa tells her he has to take a job up north building roads, taking her brother Thomas along, she is so angry at his separating her family she won't even let him hug her goodbye.

Charlie Anne's town is small, so small that there's not even a school teacher--their school has been boarded up for over a year. Charlie Anne doesn't mind, because the letters dance around and make no sense to her, and the old teacher made her stand in a trash bucket because she couldn't read properly. But life changes for her when Old Mr. Jolly, her neighbor, who isn't really so old, gets a new wife, Rosalyn, who dresses in pants and arrives with an African-American girl, Phoebe, about Charlie Anne's age. Charlie Anne "never saw a colored girl up close before," and she's not sure "if Mirabel will let me play with a colored girl or not." And can Mr. Jolly really take care of a wife when he can't even take care of his cow, Belle, wonders Charlie Anne.

Mirabel wants Charlie Anne to stay away from Phoebe, instead making Charlie Anne listen to *The Charm of Fine Manners*, a book designed to teach Charlie Anne to be a proper young lady and succeed in life. With the arrival of Phoebe into town, prejudice rears its ugly head, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Hardly anyone

will even eat the "glorious" chocolate cupcakes Phoebe and Rosalyn bring to the weekly after-church picnics. And when Rosalyn suggests during church services that, as an experienced teacher, she would like to re-open the town school, using Phoebe as her assistant to help with the younger students, the townspeople gasp in shock. No colored girl will be teaching in their town, they whisper. Pretty soon, things are "all riled up," with racial hatred turning things ugly. Can the school succeed? Can Rosalyn help Charlie Anne make sense of the dancing letters on a page...and what will happen to Charlie Anne and Phoebe's friendship? Will her family be reunited?

Charlie Anne's personality is so alive it pops off the page. I particularly liked her many moods, including her "mad-as-a-yellow-jacket face." Charlie Anne's unique relationship with family cow Anna May and her daughter Belle adds both humor and pathos to the story, as Charlie Anne translates for the reader what the cows are saying and feeling. "Their eyes fill with cow-sorrow," and "cow-worry," and "the two of them tell me how very sorry they are that I am having enough troubles to fill a wheelbarrow." Charlie Anne's charismatic voice narrates not only scenes of every day drama, such as bee stings, falls off swings, peeling potatoes, harvesting tomatoes, Christmas pageants, and kittens born in the barn, but also more profound problems, such as broken families and racism.

This is a book that made me laugh and made me cry, with a main character you won't soon forget. Highly recommended for school and public libraries, it would make a great selection as well for book clubs for young people since there is wealth of material for discussion.

Sylvia says

For the most part, I didn't really enjoy this book. Halfway through, I thought I'd pull it from the classroom library because it just seemed like a series of misbehaviors excused by Charlie Anne's difficult family circumstances. I knew there had to be more than that though, so I stuck it out and was at least appeased.

The story was slow-moving with a lot of simple descriptions of mundane daily tasks and repetition of the same phrases (placement of the milk pail, Belle wondering "what the dickens," Birdie's lemon drop, Mirabel's rebukes, "a hundred hours," &c). I did like how she imagined the voices of things around her. I probably wouldn't recommend it to a student, but if a kid really showed interest in it as a high-angst emotional piece, I'd walk through the story with them. Topics of conversation would definitely include how the characters change (especially Charlie Anne, Mirabel and Old Mr. Jolly), what influences their transformation ("It sweetens up once it's cooked. You'd be surprised how a thing can change." -p. 211, also Rosalyn's Copperfield speech on p. 213), the ineffectiveness of Charlie Anne's nasty behavior to change others' perspectives and the power of Rosalyn's kindness combined with her uncompromising stance (and Phoebe's "we're no quitters" -p. 190).

Ellie says

This book was poignant, comedic, and thoughtful. So far, this is my favorite book that I've read all year. (Well, out of the two books I've read, this one was my favorite;)

The Wonder of Charlie Anne is about a girl growing up on a farm during the Great Depression. Her mother has just passed away giving birth, and the whole family is taking the loss badly. When Charlie Anne's father

has to build roads up north to earn money, Charlie Anne is left with her strict cousin Mabel. And a house full of chores. But one day, their neighbor Old Mr. Jolly brings home a wife, and oh, golly! She's wearing PANTS. With her, she brings a girl named Phoebe and Charlie Anne and Phoebe become best friends. But when Mrs. Jolly starts up a school, hate turns their town rotten, and Charlie Anne must stand up for what she believes all while handling her father being away and her mother dead.

I would say that this book is appropriate for 10+ years. I loved this book and you should definitely read it!!!

Laurie Murphy says

I love Charlie Anne's voice. She is feisty and full of life and hope. This is another beautifully written book by Kimberly Newton Fusco.

Linda says

So I'm thinking that even though I am all done reading Charlie Anne's story, I really do miss her 'cause I got to know her like a real good friend, how she missed her Mama and all, and then her Daddy went north and left her with that Mirabel, who was trying to make a proper lady out of her, but I guess we'll just see about that, won't we? And Charlie Anne felt like she was my best friend, too, the way she talked to her cows and her hens and her cat named Big Pumpkin Face and the things that happened to her, I have lots of other books in my pile to read, but I just keep missing Charlie Anne and wishing I could spend more time with her, and that is truly a wondrous thing, and this is a wonderful book with lots and lots to say, and boy does that Charlie Anne say it. Find a copy and read it. That's all I've got to say about the matter ;-)

Cheryl says

This book is beautifully written, with a savory evocative imaginative heartfelt protagonist. Charlie Anne really is a wonder.

Hailey says

I love this book it warms my heart! Charlie Anne has gone through so much.
