



What the Moon Said

Gayle Rosengren

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Fans of the Little House books will fall in love with Esther.

Thanks to her superstitious mother, Esther knows some tricks for avoiding bad luck: toss salt over your left shoulder, never button your shirt crooked, and avoid black cats. But even luck can't keep her family safe from the Great Depression. When Pa loses his job, Esther's family leaves their comfy Chicago life behind for a farm in Wisconsin.

Living on a farm comes with lots of hard work, but that means there are plenty of opportunities for Esther to show her mother how helpful she can be. She loves all of the farm animals (except the mean geese) and even better makes a fast friend in lively Bethany. But then Ma sees a sign that Esther just knows is wrong. If believing a superstition makes you miserable, how can that be good luck?

Debut author Gayle Rosengren brings the past to life in this extraordinary, hopeful story.

What the Moon Said Details


Date : Published February 20th 2014 by G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

ISBN : 9780399163524

Author : Gayle Rosengren

Format : Hardcover 217 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Family, Juvenile, Young Adult, Religion, Superstition

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From Reader Review What the Moon Said for online ebook

Jen Downey says

Esther is a sensitive endearing heroine in this beautiful piece of historical fiction. Not just an exploration of a time and place, but of a way of perceiving the world. Once ensconced with Esther, through good times and bad, I didn't want to leave her side.

Terri says

Original review found at <http://kristineandterri.blogspot.ca/>

3.5 stars

I received a copy of this book as part of a Goodreads giveaway in exchange for an honest review.

This book is definitely geared towards the middle grade demographic. Although I have not read a lot of stories for this age group I thought this was a really cute read. It takes place during the depression so it has the historical fiction aspect that I love in my reads. It gives the opportunity to educate young readers about the time in a way that they do not really realise they are learning something.

This story was written in a way that there were no real bad people in the story. Through Esther the reader goes on a journey of life changes and learning to accept things the way they are. This is a story about family and love and growing up.

Although this was not a challenging read for me I still enjoyed the time I spent in the story. I would recommend this book to the younger audience who is not looking for a lot of action. I can see that this story could be of good educational use.

Catherine says

I think it was a wonderful. The book was placed in the Depression, and Esther, the main character, is trying to make her mother love her with hugs and kisses. But Esther does not understand what real love is and what her mother is doing to love her, which is being kind and considerate and patient. Along the way, she finds out what real love is.

J & J says

A sad but happy book! I wish in the ending Ma would have done something more than just smile at her, but I'm not the author. ??????????

Ranee says

Do you know the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover?” Well, I totally do that, at least when it comes to actual books. It’s the first thing that draws me to a book, and I have a sneaking suspicion that I’m not alone in this. The cover wouldn’t be so important otherwise, right? Well, when I decided to review a new juvenile book (middle-grade to be exact), I scrolled through all the covers of new releases until this one struck me. The cover was beautiful with the large moon hanging behind the title, and the little girl and her dog running across it lent a hopeful feeling. The book blurb seemed promising so I gave it a shot. Luckily for me, *What the Moon Says* was a stunning debut for Gayle Rosengren.

When Esther’s father loses his job in the city during the Depression, the family makes a hard move to a farm to try their hand, and luck, at farming and living off the land. The book follows their ups and downs as they discover both the rewards and the heartaches of farm life. Esther’s mother is extremely superstitious and sees signs in almost everything. The book isn’t called *What the Moon Says* for nothing. Esther’s mother, or Ma as she calls her, dictates many decisions by the current position, shade, and so on, of the moon. Her decisions often set the rest of the family either at ease or at incredible unease.

“Ma,” she said, pointing at the sky. “It’s the moon! And it’s daytime. How can that be?”

Ma gazed up at the white circle in the bright blue sky. She frowned.

“What does it mean, Anna?” Pa asked anxiously.

“It means a change is coming,” she said.

“A good one or a bad one?” Violet asked.

Ma shook her head. “Just a change.” She looked at Pa. “It could be good or bad.”

Pa stood silent for a moment.

The moon is only the beginning of the superstitions. There’s everything from empty buckets, seeing spiders in the morning, shirts buttoned incorrectly, shoes on a table, and so much more. What I love about the superstitions is how well they were done. It could easily have turned into an annoyance but ended up as an endearing, and often entertaining, aspect of the story.

What the Moon Said has strong characters that made me care. Ma is a hard woman; a woman who doles out affection sparingly, and is more affectionate (although, not by much) with Esther’s siblings than she ever is with Esther leading Esther to believe that her mother doesn’t love her.

If only Ma would hug her and say, “It will be all right.” That would make the trembling stop, Esther was sure. And if Ma loved Esther more, she might say and do these things. But Ma did not love her enough. Not yet.

Esther's heartache over this dilemma completely tore me apart. While there were times that I grew tired of hearing about her fear that Ma didn't love her (because it is said a whole heck of a lot), I also understand that children are really capable of honing in on one subject and drilling it into the ground (I know mine do). In other words, Esther's fear is believable.

Navigating through changes, new friendships, lost friendships, and loneliness with Esther was a journey that I enjoyed being on. While the times weren't always happy—in fact, they were often downright depressing (no pun intended)—the story felt very realistic. This is a strong piece of historical fiction for children—or anyone who just loves to read books, despite the intended age range (myself included, obviously)—that provides a fine example of life during the Depression.

Liz says

Completely adorable. If you are a fan of the Little House books, you MUST read Rosengren's debut. You'll love Esther's adventures in depression-era Wisconsin!

Akoss says

What The Moon Said is to me, a story about the real meaning of love.

All through their challenges during the great recession, Esther tried over and over to make her mother show her that she loves her. She wanted her mother to hug her and tell her she loves her. In the end, after many hardships and tears and painful moments she realized things are never white or black.

I lost count of all the many moments I saw similarities between Esther's life and my own childhood. Some of them are too personal to share on the internet. Others have a bittersweet taste like I remember making cones out of old newspapers as a kid so I could go sell roasted peanuts during summer breaks with my cousins.

Esther's family went through a lot and her mother's superstition didn't help much. However I loved that even the mother had to learn the hard way that sometimes signs could be wrong or better yet they could mean nothing at all. I love that this book showed in a vivid and poignant way that maybe real love is to stick together when life get rough, when life gets so gloom and dark and hopeless that you can only hope to make it till tomorrow, and maybe the day after and so on.

This is a quiet book but a very powerful one. It teaches a lot of lessons but not in a preachy way. You see everything Esther feels. You are right there in her thoughts. You struggle with her over what decision is the right one. You get angry with her when she fails over and over to make her mother see her when she's doing good things, great things, and not when she messes up.

I remembered all those feelings and I was shocked at how raw some of them still were, after so many years. This book needs to get into the hands of every kid.

I apologize this review is so personal. On a lighter note, if you enjoy books like The Little House on The Prairie you might enjoy What The Moon Said. And if you accidentally knocked over salt don't forget to throw some over your left shoulder. Just in case, because you never know.

Liza Wiemer says

An outstanding MG novel that I'm sure will become a favorite of students and teachers alike. I was

completely captivated by this historical fiction novel, which takes place during the Depression. Esther is a young girl struggling to get her mom's approval and love. Her mom is very superstitious and these superstitions guide Esther's entire family, determining the good luck and bad luck they'll have. At times, it's frustrating, hurtful, and confusing for Esther, especially when she is forbidden to play with a girl she really likes as a friend.

Readers will move with Esther and her family from Chicago to a farm in Milwaukee. They'll experience hunger, they'll celebrate the holidays with them, they'll go through Esther's illness and recovery. Even though the novel takes place a good eighty years ago, readers will be able to relate to the characters. Family, friendship, and being neighborly are some of the bigger themes of this novel. It'll have a timeless appeal like *Little Women* and *Little House on the Prairie*.

This MG novel is a winner!

Catherine Linka says

If I had to choose one word to describe this book it would be "kind."

Esther wants so much for her mother to tell her she loves her, but Ma is not the demonstrative type. And Esther's journey is to learn that love is expressed in many ways.

Great for a snuggle in bed read aloud, as well as an accurate portrait of the struggles of an immigrant family during the Depression.

Sandy Brehl says

This story combines the best of a classic vignette-based tale with elements seldom found in books for this age. Set in an early year of the depression, it spans life in a Chicago apartment and a rural SE Wisconsin farm community. Esther deals with some self-inflicted angst about not being loved as much as her siblings, but also faces the power and fears conveyed by her mother's strict adherence to old world superstitions. Throughout it all she takes tentative steps toward maturity, gaining perspective and appreciation for her family.

Esther and her stories will stay with me.

Melissa Landers says

So bittersweet! I want to give Esther a hug...no, not just one hug...ALL THE HUGS! Knowing that Esther's book is based on the real experiences of author's mother made the story events hit so much closer. And I love the ending. Without giving away too much, it's hopeful but realistic. I'd recommend this book to fans of the "Little House on the Prairie" series.

Leila says

What the Moon Said

'What the Moon Said' is one of the best books I have read in a long time yet it is for eight to twelve year olds.

I found it a beautiful read set in the time of the great depression in America. The main character is little Esther and the themes in the book are centered on this child. Sometimes she is the narrator when for example she describes her bewilderment at some of the painful issues between her Mother and herself. Her Father is American and her Mother is Russian and is fanatical in her superstitious nature. This aspect of her character runs through the whole story causing Esther in particular problems in whether to believe them or not.

The large family, all girls except the youngest child, face the unexpected risk of poverty when the Father loses his job in the city and decides to put what savings they have into purchasing a farm out in the country. Little Esther, a dreamy imaginative child lives a dual life. When things are too hard for Esther to bear, she retreats into her private dream world where she can escape from the pain of reality often conversing with her beloved doll. This often gets her into trouble.

Esther longs to feel loved by her Mother who spends all of her days working hard to keep her family fed and clothed. Esther cannot seem to sense this love no matter how she tries to please her Mother. She is sure in her heart that she is not good enough to be loved and often makes unfavourable comparisons concerning her Mother's attitude towards her elder sister and younger brother in contrast to how her Mother treats her.

This fear is manifested primarily in her relationship with her superstitious Russian Mother. Esther sees her Mother as someone who is always irritated, disappointed or even angry with her. In her mind she does not have her Mother's approval, so to escape from this pain she retreats into her imaginary world where her Mother is all loving. She does endure a lot of emotional stress for because of her low self esteem for she herself does make many mistakes in her efforts in general to receive love. Esther doesn't realise how often her hard pressed Mother is irritated by her own constant day dreaming when she should be doing things her Mother has asked her to do.

In the latter part of the book, the harsh conditions during the long hard winter escalates, causing the family and their animals to suffer general hardship. Hunger is their greatest enemy. Food has run out and the family are starving and in desperate need.

It is at this point that dramatic events now take place leading to Esther being returned to Chicago to stay with her big sister Julie.

It is in this latter part of the book; Esther finally begins to learn the truth about love and the acceptance of reality rather than forever escaping into her imaginary world with her beloved doll to find it. She discovers what it actually means to her alone, rather than having her big sister Julie's explanation. She discovers that love is not just about hugs and kisses. She at last learns that words can be the smallest part of loving.

The continuing struggle with the state of affairs on the farm now causes the whole family to have to come back to Chicago. This is where the author ties up all the loose ends to finish the story.

Earlier in the book, Esther had longed for her own Mother to give her hugs and kisses in the way her best friend received so many from her own stoic Mother. At the end of the book she learns that her friend's Mother had left the family to run off with a lover.

She might not be so demonstrative and she causes issues with her superstitious nature, but her love for her family shines through all the hard work and dedication in the way she gives her whole life to keeping the family together no matter how hard the choices she has to make. She improvises, no matter what dark clouds of troubles swirl around them.

One small issue I do have with the ending is that it feels a little rushed. It is almost as if that now Esther's problems are ironed out... she isn't sure where to go next, for Esther is without doubt the major character. This is just my personal impression though and others might not agree with me.

I had a constant lump in my throat during most of the second half of the book and found myself fighting tears. I identified with this lonely little girl. She tries so hard to please her Mother as the story unfolds.

As a child and into my teens even, I also struggled with my perception of an undemonstrative Mother that I carried inside of me for various personal reasons. I seemed to be a disappointment to her no matter how hard I tried.

I recommend this book highly. I enjoyed it as an adult. It would also be ideal to read with your children or to them.

Amanda Coppedge says

What a perfect historical fiction middle-grade novel--it is right on the nose for about age 8-10, the perfect next step for children who have outgrown books like Mary Pope Osborne's Magic Tree House series. This will greatly appeal to fans of the Little House in the Big Woods series. I love the chapter heading art by Jonathan Bean ("Building Our House"). Lends itself to so many educational extension activities--sure to become a great favorite of teachers and homeschooling families.

Manybooks says

Although I originally read this exquisite and heartwarming novel in 2014, I loved Gail Rosengren's What the Moon Said so much, I adored it so much that I simply have not been able to pen and post a for and to me adequate review. Since the author is also a GR friend, I recently realised that I should really post a review, although I still think that any review I do post, will not even remotely come close to describing how much this book was and still is a pleasure and a joy to read (I have reread it at least five times since 2014 and each time, I love and appreciate it even more, and will more than likely continue to do so).

Now I think one of the main reasons that I enjoyed What the Moon Said so very much is the fact that the father is German and the mother Russian (or perhaps Russian Mennonite), but that even though the story takes place in 1930's America, there is no "all Germans are evil" presented and shown; it is simply a story about individuals, many of them of German background (and mostly farmers) trying to make ends meet, and how the whole community helps and sustains one another. While I do have some rather huge issues with the mother and her strict and uncompromising ways, I actually also very much appreciate the fact that the author has not shied away from depicting her as a character with faults and problematic, superstitious ideas (and one should indeed remember that the mother does, in fact, apologise and accept that she has made mistakes, and that alone, is worth gold in my opinion).

Yes, What the Moon Said is, indeed, truly wonderful (a real treasure and a perfect book for middle grade readers to read on their own or with their parents). And truth be told, I actually adored What the Moon Said almost as much as the *Anne of Green Gables* series and those who know me should realise that this is probably the absolute highest praise I can give to a children's book. Most highly recommended to anyone, and even many adults will likely find this book a lovely reading pleasure!

Jean says

A ring around the moon is an omen of bad things to come. Ten-year-old Esther doesn't know whether or not she believes her Ma's superstitions, but the moon's warning seems to come true when her father loses his job in Chicago. The year is 1930 and the nation is in the grip of the Great Depression. City jobs are impossible to find. Esther and her family move to a ramshackle farm in Wisconsin to eke a living out of the land. There is no electricity or plumbing, but Esther is excited about the move. There are horses and cows and, best of all, a dog.

Not wanting to bring more misfortune, Esther does her best to follow her Ma's rules. But life is not simple when a sign of bad luck means that Esther must turn her back on the only friend she has. Esther is caught between loyalty to her Ma and her own heart, all while trying to survive the harsh Wisconsin winter.

Rosengren's WHAT THE MOON SAID is a large-hearted debut. It is my favorite kind of historical fiction, making a long-ago time feel as real and relatable as current day. While some of Esther's struggles — farm life and gripping poverty — may be unfamiliar to some young readers, Esther's deepest wishes will hit very close to home. Readers will easily see themselves in Esther's desire to understand her place in the family, her need for friendship, and her pleasure in everyday adventure.
