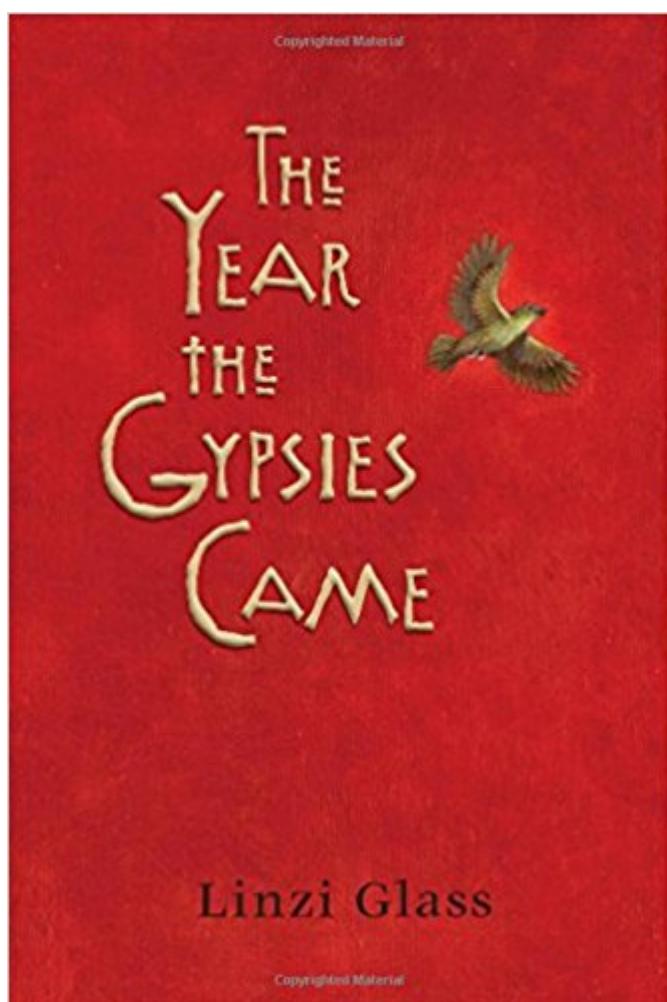


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The Year The Gypsies Came



Synopsis

Set in apartheid South Africa, this powerful and lyrically written novel is Linzi Glass's debut. As twelve-year-old Emily Iris explains it, her mother and father have always been eager to take in travelers and vagabonds, relying on the presence of outsiders to ease the tension between them. Emily has her gentle older sister, Sarah, and Buza, the old Zulu nightwatchman, for company and comfort. But her parents' continuing discontent leads them to welcome some peculiar strangers. One spring, a family of wanderers--a wildlife photographer, his wife, and two boys--comes to stay, and their strange, compelling, and dangerous presence will leave the Iris family infinitely changed.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 930L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 272 pages

Publisher: Henry Holt and Co. (BYR); First Edition edition (March 21, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0805079998

ISBN-13: 978-0805079999

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 1.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 18 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,943,230 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #65 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Africa #973 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Prejudice & Racism #1063 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Africa

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up This story of a fateful year in a girl's life takes place in 1960s apartheid South Africa. In order to divert attention away from their failing marriage, Emily's emotionally distant parents invite a family to stay in a camper in their yard. Emily befriends the younger son, Streak, while the older son, Otis, who is clearly brain damaged, becomes almost a devoted shadow to her gentle and loving older sister, Sarah. It soon becomes clear that the boys' father beats them regularly, and that one of his beatings most likely led to Otis's condition. Emily increasingly looks to Buza, the night watchman, for love and reassurance, and he shares folktales and traditional Zulu wisdom with her.

The relationship between Otis and Sarah becomes more and more tense, and Otis rapes her. Through tragedy, the girls' parents finally come to a truce. Emily's relationships with the people close to her ring true, and her friendship with Streak has its touching moments. However, the dialogue is uneven. Streak's semi-educated speech, for instance, sounds more American than South African. While the story has emotional power and shows something of the class and race relationships of the time, it lacks a deep grounding in the social context, such as that shown in Beverley Naidoo's collection *Out of Bounds* (HarperCollins, 2003). Instead, it focuses primarily on Emily and her tragic family circumstances. Suggest this one to readers who are always looking for a sad book. Sue Giffard, Ethical Culture Fieldston School, New York City Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Gr. 8-11. Growing up in a wooded Johannesburg suburb 40 years ago, Emily, 12, takes her white privilege for granted. Her anguish is mostly about her parents' daily fights, and when they take in a family of wandering Australians, "Gypsies," she hopes tensions at home will ease. As it turns out, the Gypsy trailer holds unspeakable violence that spills over into Emily's family. Seen through Emily's viewpoint, the characters are one-dimensional: her perfect older sister ("pure and good"); adulterous, narcissistic Mother; cold, distracted Father. In contrast there's Buza, the wise, saintly Zulu night watchman, who teaches and comforts Emily with stories--from Zulu folklore to Mandela's speech in court. What will hold readers in this first novel are the powerful family story and the horror of the racist regime. Buza is Emily's true parent-caregiver, and only later does she confront the distress of his legally enforced, lifelong isolation from his real daughter and family. When Buza is arrested for not having appropriate papers, Emily finally sees the daily police brutality, and the war of apartheid enters her home. For more about coming-of-age in a racist regime, see the adjacent Read-alikes: "Growing Up under Apartheid." Hazel RochmanCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Before reading "The Year The Gypsies Came" by Linzi Glass I read all the glowing reviews with a skeptic's eye. Now that I have just completed this book let me rush to join the chorus who sing its praises. This intimate family story envelops the reader not only in the personal, but also in the larger story of Apartheid in South Africa. The novel becomes increasingly engaging as it unfolds. Especially compelling is the relationship between the young narrator, Emily, and the elderly Zulu night watchman with his wondrous tales filled with poetic wisdom. The impressive narrative is tightly woven and moves inexorably forward. Every word, phrase and sentence is there for a reason. How

refreshing and unusual it is to find a book that is neither too long, nor hopelessly marred by excessive details. Linzi Glass' remarkable achievement is that through her lyrical prose she presents simultaneously the astonishing beauty of her native South Africa along with its correspondent sadness. Some of my best friends are my books. I often go back to a select few and reread passages that I have found to be particularly memorable. Surely "The Year The Gypsies Came" will join my group of special friends.

Set in South Africa in the early 1960's the story is about a dysfunctional family who play host to a family of displaced wanderers. Beautifully written, the tale enfolds a rich carpet of characters and events that have a far-reaching affect on all involved. I was captivated with this book.

Another book that I wanted to read after my high school librarian booktalked it. Set in South Africa during Apartheid, Emily's family is falling apart. Mother and Father rarely speak, and when they do it is just to argue. Mother is upset that Father isn't keeping her in the lifestyle that she imagined for herself, and Father is tired of Mother's browbeating. The only time that her parents seem to stop arguing is when other people stay at their compound. This time it's the gypsies. Not gypsies like one would imagine, her Father assures Emily. This is a wandering family from Australia. Jock, the nature photographer, wife Peg (with her omnipresent snake Opalina around her neck), and sons Otis and Streak. It's plain to see that Otis is simply not right in the head, and Streak is a bit of a wild one himself. Emily immediately takes to Streak, and sister Sarah is so kind and gentle that Otis' ways do not seem to bother her. The family's night watchman, Buza, has a bad feeling about these visitors. Emily spends her evenings with Buza, listening to his Zulu stories. He is the only person who can make Emily feel whole as her family splinters apart. ***** This is a beautifully written tragedy. Emily is young enough that her emotions are raw and on the surface and Linzi Glass writes her voice perfectly. In fact there are no weak characters in this story. Each is integral, and everyone grows in some way. I have a bit of an interest in South Africa as a friend of mine lived there for several years, and I have recently acquired a South African penpal. However, I think that this is a book that will appeal to most fans of the written word. It is not for younger YAs as themes of infidelity, sexual abuse, and death are present. It is, however, wonderfully written and a pleasure (despite the pain) to read.

The Iris family lives in Johannesburg, Africa. Where you can "fall asleep with the faint roar of a lion or the laugh of a hyena coming across the lake." Their story takes place in the Spring of 1966 and is

described through the eyes of the youngest member, twelve-year-old Emily. Other members of the family include mother Lily, father Bob and older sister Sarah. Emily has short dark hair and is a tomboy. She thinks dolls are boring and hates the colour pink. Her only friend in school is Cynthia Wright but her most important relationship is the one she has with her sister. She and Sarah are always compassionate to one another even with something as simple as a game of checkers. Bob comes home to let them know he ran into some 'gypsies' on one of his walks and they accepted his offer to park their trailer at the end of their estate. The Gypsies are made up of Jock and Peg Mallory and their two sons Streak and Otis. They aren't real gypsies but have travelled the continent in their trailer since before the boys were born. Jock supports his family as a wild life photographer. The boys immediately take a liking to the Iris girls spending any time they can with them outside of the girls' school. Another important character is sweet Buza, the night watchman/gate keeper. He is an elderly Zulu man and story teller who walks with a cane and tells stories to Emily when she comes to visit him in the watch house. He is her confidant and surrogate parent. Through him Linzi Glass laces short African tales which offer their own little morals within a few pages. One of my favourite was the story of Ma-We and the honey guide. Others include the python story, the wolf story, the story of Rolihlahla and the story of two sisters, Yaphansi and Intombi. I would love to read more about Buza and his history. As the weeks pass Emily becomes stricken by the stories Streak shares with her about his family. Her own family doesn't look so bad after all. A growing fear murmurs inside her whenever she's around Jock. It isn't until one fearful night she realizes her fear was misdirected. But by then it's too late and her and Sarah's lives are changed forever. The use of simile is overbearing at times and some of the content is a little more mature than I would like for young adult readers. At the end is a helpful glossary of Afrikaans / Zulu words and Expressions. The Year of the Gypsies Came is Linzi Glass' first novel and she has created a compelling story with interesting characters. I couldn't help but care about them and I could literally feel the tension the author creates for Emily and Sarah when their parents argue. It's painful. The love Emily feels for Sarah and Buza is palpable. I was touched by their relationships. This book is worth reading for its sentiment and hint of African culture. Reviewed by M. E. Wood

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