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The Second Mrs. Gioconda



Synopsis

THE GREATEST ARTIST OF HIS TIME AN APPRENTICE WITH A LARCENOUS HEART AND AN AVERSION TO THE TRUTH A YOUNG DUTCHESS WHOSE PLAIN FACE BELIES HER BEAUTIFUL SOUL Could the complex ways these three lives intertwine hold the key to a historical riddle as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa's smile -- why Leonardo da Vinci devoted three years to a painting of the second wife of an unimportant merchant when all the nobles of Europe were begging for a portrait by his hand? Only a master storyteller like two-time Newberry Medal-winner E.L. Konigsburg could create such an intriguing answer to the puzzle behind the most famous painting of all time.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

The Mona Lisa... Why did Leonardo da Vinci lavish three years on a painting of the second wife of an unimportant merchant when all the nobles of Europe were begging for a portrait by his hand? No one knows for sure. But this story of Leonardo, his wayward apprentice Salai, and the Duke of Milan's plain young wife, Beatrice d'Este, may hold the clue to the most famous -- and puzzling -- painting of all time. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

E.L. Konigsburg is the only author to have won the Newberry Medal and a Newbery Honor in the

same year. In 1968, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* won the Newbery Medal and *Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth* was named a Newbery Honor Book. Almost thirty years later she won the Newbery Medal once again for *The View from Saturday*. Among her other acclaimed books are *Silent to the Bone*, *The Outcasts of 19 Schuyler Place*, and *The Mysterious Edge of the Heroic World*.

I enjoyed this book. I recommend it to people ages 13+, as there is a curse in it, but otherwise, it is a wonderful book. I would read it for myself, if I were you.

I recently went on vacation to Milan and it was fun having read this book and walk through the streets that Leonardo Da Vinci did. Interestingly, I mentioned the Mona Lisa to our tour guide and she said that although most of the world refers to the painting as the Mona Lisa, in Italy they call it the Gioconda.

The back of this book promises a historically-based novel about one of Leonardo's apprentices, Salai, the relationship they share with a duchess named Beatrice, and the real answer to why the Mona Lisa was ever painted to begin with. And the start of the book is exactly that: Salai, a young thief without much of a future, becomes accidentally employed by Leonardo DaVinci, the greatest artist of their time. Employed by the Duke of Milan at the time, Leonardo introduces Salai to art, the court, and to the duke's young wife, Beatrice, who is proud to be plain-faced but full of spirit. And that's about as good as the book gets, honestly. I can't really explain why I didn't like it except to say that I feel like Konigsburg didn't know what book she was writing. The "mystery" of the Mona Lisa is never explained or even really fleshed out; in fact, the famous painting doesn't get its first mention until the last three pages. She attempts, in those pages, to draw this long, complex comparison of the woman who became the Mona Lisa to Beatrice, but it feels rushed and entirely out of place. All of a sudden, WHAM!, the explanation smacks the reader in the face. There's no subtlety, there's no craft, it just...is. Salai's interior monologue basically says And Leonardo will paint this woman because she will remind him of Beatrice, the end. It felt completely thrown together. My other challenge -- and the one, honestly, that upset me more -- was the haphazard way she threw in details that I find it hard to believe ever existed. She admits that Leonardo didn't think much of the real Salai. In his notebooks, he described him as a thief, a liar, and a mule-head. It's clear that he had some fondness because, in the end, Salai was mentioned in his will, but the book raises Salai up as both a liar and a wonderful human being. I felt like he was completely inconsistent, because

even though he was constantly doing small, immoral things, he was also the lens through which we were meant to see the wonder of this world, and it contrasted severely. More than that, Konigsburg villainized DaVinci. A lot. In the last chapters, he's described as a petty man with low self esteem and it's insinuated that Salai is becoming the person who decides what he will do, when, and with who. I find it hard to believe that one of the greatest minds of the human race would be manipulated left and right by a twenty-year-old. I also just find it hard to believe that anything in this book happened the way it was described. I was really disappointed. I thought this would be mysterious and fun. Instead, it was boring, bland, and unrealistic. The only boon was that it was short, but that really didn't win it enough points for me to find it at all worth while.

I was disappointed in the content for a children's book. However, the author's style is age appropriate.

Excellent read for those that want to brush up on their history of Leonardo.

Terrific book

fine

As a supplement to our studies of the Renaissance this year, this book was an excellent choice for 7th grade. I loved the aspect of how relationships can change and grow - a perfect theme for emerging adolescents.

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