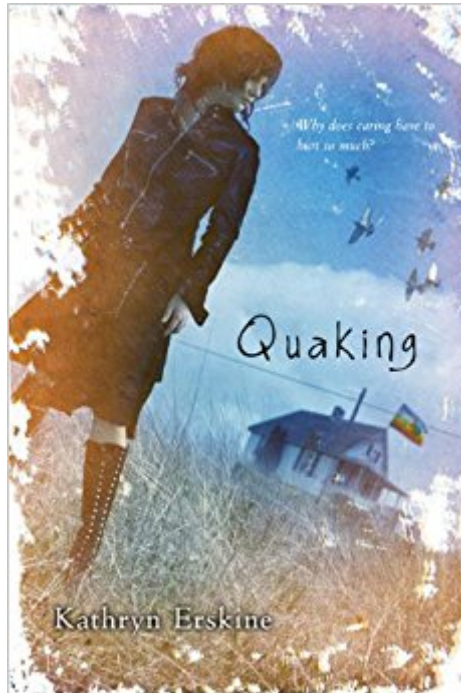




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Quaking



Synopsis

Goth girl Matt lives her life by simple rules: Stay under the radar, never go by Matilda (only Matt), and don't let anyone get too close. But everything changes when she moves in with a peaceful Quaker family in Pennsylvania. As the country fights a war in the Middle East, Matt fights her own personal war, battling bullies of her past and present and fighting to stand up for her belief in peace. Then violence erupts in town, and Matt finds that she will need to fight even harder to save the family she is starting to love.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Fourteen-year-old Matt (short for Matilda) arrives at her latest foster home and discovers that her new guardians have personalities--and convictions--as strong as her own. Unwillingly at first, Matt eventually accompanies foster parent Sam to Quaker Friends' meetings. She also learns to cope with a new school, where she likes most of the classes but fears a bully and her world civ. teacher. A series of attacks on area houses of worship--presumably by locals angered by antiwar sentiments espoused by the Quaker congregation members--builds to a heavily foreshadowed climax. In spite of Matt's rather quick adjustment to family life after years of fear and emotional deadening, this is a

compelling story, which enfolds the political issues into a deeper focus on the characters' personal stories. Idealistic teens will be interested in Matt's growing acceptance of her new family, of Quaker values, and of her need to take action, rather than simply observe. Francisca GoldsmithCopyright
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Kathryn Erskine spent many years as a lawyer before realizing that she'd rather write things that people might actually enjoy reading. She grew up mostly overseas and attended eight different schools, her favorite being the Hogwarts-type castle in Scotland. The faculty, of course, did not consist of wizards, although . . . how did the headmistress know that it was the wee redhead who led the campaign to free the mice from the biology lab? Erskine draws on her childhood and her second childhood through her children for her stories. She still loves to travel but nowadays most trips tend to be local, such as basketball and tennis courts, occasional emergency room visits, and the natural food store for very healthy organic chocolate with life saving flavonoids.

QUAKING is a book about seeking peace. It tells the tale of an exceptionally bright girl named Matt who has been thrown about and bruised by the foster care system so often that she has developed a dark, tough exterior to cover the fears that often find her quaking. When she lands with Sam and his family of gentle, peace-seeking Quakers, she discovers that sometimes you have to face your fears instead of hiding from them. Few readers will fail to identify, down into their innermost core, with the basic terrors that haunt Matt. And no one can help but rejoice as Matt forces herself to rise about them to help her new family in its quest for a peaceful existence. Erskine writes even the simplest scenes with gut-wrenching emotion. And her masterful treatment of the love that Sam and his family show Matt, such as when Jessica bakes Matt a pie, will leave the reader in tears. But most importantly, this is a must-read for young people left confused by today's environment of intolerance and war. A great debut novel (hope there will be more!) and an unforgettable read that will leave you quaking.

Kathryn Erskine's first novel is emotionally-charged, thought-provoking, and well-written overall. It follows the story of Matt, a teenage girl whose behavior has landed her in a number of different homes. This time, she has to live with a family of Quakers. Although this social outcast seems to have nothing in common with her new family, she slowly begins to respect their views. As she adapts to her new home, she must also adapt to her new school, where she is usually ignored...

until she makes a few enemies. Matt's narration sometimes comes off as a bit stilted, using phrasing that doesn't sound like it would come from a teenager. This is somewhat justified in how she is far ahead of the average student, but there are a few lines that struck me as awkward and briefly took me out of the story. Luckily, Matt's character is interesting, as Erskine provides just the right amount of back-story to make her feel human, yet not so much as to bore the reader. The family she stays with also seems realistic; each member adds something interesting to the novel. The novel is full of conflict, hitting a wide variety of emotions just right. Some scenes are sad, others heartwarming, others suspenseful, others funny. Although Erskine occasionally slips into melodrama, she's usually very adept at balancing drama with some lighthearted scenes or witty comic relief. Although I feel like the story could use one more chapter to wrap things up more neatly, the pacing is usually just right. Erskine has travelled many places and has met many people, which is clear in her interesting portrayal of the Quaker religion as a whole. We find out about their history, how they worship, and how they encourage people to live peacefully. I, for one, learned a number of interesting facts about this unique sect of Christianity. Also, Erskine does a good job depicting how pacifists such as them struggle in our violent world today. The thematic scope of the book is large enough that I could easily recommend it to adults. Plus, our narrator isn't a girly girl by any means, so the average male should have no problem reading this. I do have one serious problem with the book, though. It's clear that Erskine wants to promote pacifism and dispel some myths about it. That is fine with me: it gives the work depth beyond mere entertainment. Not to mention I'm a pacifist myself. But the thing is, I cannot imagine a non-pacifist making it through this book. The only two pro-war characters that play a significant role in the story are both very dislikable people. One is a punk kid often referred to as "the Rat," and the other is a blowhard teacher with nose hair that looks like Adolf Hitler's mustache. They both curse like sailors and treat pacifists like dung. Can you imagine how a non-pacifist would react while reading how they're portrayed? I wouldn't be shocked if the reader closed the book, completely offended, and never came back. Sure, you do get some more information on these pro-war characters later in the story, so they are not one-dimensional. But I could imagine most non-pacifists giving up on the book before reaching that point. More problematic, not once does Erskine give us a nice character who, through their own logic, has come to believe that war is necessary. Nope, all the pro-war characters are cocky, brainless blowhards in this novel. I know plenty of nice people who are in favor of war. They deserve fair representation, even if we pacifists don't agree with their logic. Since I can't imagine a pro-war reader making it through the book, Erskine is basically preaching to the choir here. You'll enjoy the read as long as you're not in favor of war, but don't give this novel to anyone in hopes of "converting" them. Don't get me wrong:

Erskine is telling an emotionally-charged story with interesting characters, so the book definitely has plenty of merits. I enjoyed reading it, and I hope you will too.

Quaking is a book about struggle and the need to fit in.. The need to overcome past hurts and find your true self. The book is about a young girl who has had many struggles in her young life, and found a way to become a part of a family. Matt is a girl who has known hurts that were heart wrenching. She was beaten by her dad, watched her mom die, and took on a hard core shell to never be hurt again. She becomes Goth so that people would stay away from her. She had the need to fit after being shipped from home to home. She finds peace and solace in a Quaker home. She finds out who she is and finds a family who loves her and struggles to help her accept life, love and values. She finds her voice and her true self. It is a book that will lead you through many different events and help you find your true self and identity. This is a must read for whoever struggles to find your way and your voice.

Looking for a young adult book that will engage a young reader and open the door to discussions about peace, tolerance, and true courage? This is the book. Erskine's writing makes Matt seem as real as the kid you sat next to on the school bus. The reader quickly cares about her struggles to find safety and happiness. For some kids, this book may be a reminder that life isn't so easy for everyone. The window into Quaker beliefs may trigger curiosity for the more spiritually inclined. Most compelling at this point in history is the exploration of what it means to be a patriot. It reminds us that moral courage may be the only effective "weapon" to battle jingoism and intolerance. This book is beautifully written and is a fine addition to a bookshelf for kids who want a great story that also deals with moral questions that counter the shallowness of popular culture.

Multi-leveled. Deals with issues young people face every day and don't know how to resolve. Well done!

If you are mad at the war in Iraq you will like this book. If you wonder how it feels to be a foster kid tossed from house to house, you will love this book. If you've had a really crazy fanatical teacher like the main character Matt does, you will totally relate. Really great read. Beckie Weinheimer, author CONVERTING KATE, Viking Books 2007.

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