



Of Sound Mind

Jean Ferris

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A poignant novel partially set in a world of silence

High school senior Theo is fluent in two languages: spoken English and sign. His parents and brother, Jeremy, are deaf, but Theo can hear, which has over the years cast him in the role of interpreter for his family. Unfortunately, it's not a welcome duty, especially in the case of his mother, Palma. She is a successful sculptor who, being deeply suspicious of "hearies," expects Theo to act as her business manager. And Jeremy relies on Theo for company and homework help. It's become especially frustrating lately because Theo has met a fascinating new girl at school, Ivy, with whom he wants to spend as much time as possible. Theo's father, Thomas, is the only one who has never burdened him, but that changes when Thomas has a stroke. Palma, frightened and self-absorbed, cannot bring herself to nurse her husband, leaving Theo with the full burden to bear. But with the help of Ivy and some of her friends, Theo is finally able to change his family's dynamics and find time to plan his future.

Of Sound Mind Details

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From Reader Review Of Sound Mind for online ebook

Shatha says

I've owned this book for 10 years and it's still as great as it was the first time I read it. I think I read this once a year :)

Miriam Salomon says

I totally loved this book. Theo is not a normal high school senior. His entire family is deaf. He's dedicated to his family, to take care of them and to always being there to help them even if this might affect his future. He loves his family but wants to go to college and go away from home at the same time. This becomes a really hard decision until he meets this girl who totally changes his mind and helps him realize that can do both things at the same time, love and take care of his family and make his dream of going to college come true. I think this is a General Fiction book. I recommend this book to people who really care about other's needs and feelings because it really gets to you and shows you how being different can change someone's life and we tend to judge people when they are different not knowing that we might hurt them.

My favorite quotation in this book is by Ivy "then you should get a scholarship, or a work-study, or a loan. You have to be able to do what you're meant to do" I like it because it shows how passionate Ivy is about encouraging Theo to go to college and making him realize that he has to do what he is meant to do and that his family will be fine with it.

A text-to-text connection would be the book "A Journey Into the Deaf-World" by Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan because it talks about how deaf people are, it goes further on explaining how their lives are. A text-to-self connection would be my parents not wanting me to do something I want to do just because it didn't work for them or because they need me to be with them. It helps me understand and relate to Theo's situation. A text-to-world connection is how people don't fight for their dreams, they just wait and nothing happens. People are very selfish these days and all they ever think about is themselves. Something that has to change.

I rated this book 5 stars because it really helps me understand how life is not easy for everyone and that sometimes we have to sacrifice for others, it helps me realize that when we are selfish we hurt other people without knowing it. And also, I love how it encourages people to follow their dreams no matter how hard it is.

Kalyn Schwartz says

In the beginning this book had my attention and made me want to read more. It interested me because of the sign language in the story. Even though Theo goes through life with a different view because of his parents being deaf, he still faces the reality all teenagers face. Especially when it comes to being in love and pursuing your dreams. When things get tough, he doesn't give up though, which I admired. I recommend this book to teenagers, they can relate to the story line with Theo.

Rebecca McNutt says

This book was really well-written and it takes a different approach and style. The story also raises awareness of what being a deaf teenager is like, and honestly Theo is just like any other kid, dreading the future and finding himself facing adult decisions for the first time. Already an interpreter for most of his family, on top of that he's a high school senior and it won't be long before he goes off to college or university.

Caitlin L says

Started this a week ago for my sign language class, omg it's soooo good! Totally not what I expected and I loved it <3

Joan says

I read this as pure bibliotherapy. I had surgery for a CI this week and this book is perfect for why I do NOT want to be deaf. Theo is the one hearing person in his family of two parents, and a younger brother. He is a senior and is tired of being the free interpreter at everything in his family. His dad tries hard....too hard....to not use Theo's interpretation skills but his mother gleefully uses the skills. She clearly plans on using his skills forever, depriving him literally of a life for one as a servant to his mother forever. Theo meets the new girl at school, Ivy, who has a deaf dad too. However, Ivy has plans for her future which includes her amazing cooking skills. The scene of Thomas in the hospital with the hospital not realizing that the patient was deaf was really terrifying. I brought along a package I got from HLAA for the hospital, including stickers, buttons, etc. I didn't need it since I wasn't staying overnight and since the surgery was for a CI, they HAD to know I didn't hear in one ear! However, the surgeon thought the package was a great idea, just not necessary this time. Great book for a resounding vote on just why CI can make a world of difference for the deaf. Caution: book is likely controversial among those Deaf who are antagonistic to CI because Deaf culture is a big thing. Thanks but I'll take a lot less culture and a lot more ability to manage my own life without interpreters. etc!

Robin says

I am abandoning this book. As a bilingual person and a teacher of bilingual students, I found the beginning of the book intriguing. I can relate to the unfairness of children finding it necessary to translate for adults and could feel Theo's internal struggles. I have always wanted to learn ASL, which was one of the reasons I was drawn to this book.

I quickly became disillusioned with the book, however, due to the portrayal of women, especially Theo's mother, Palma. I find her portrayal unfair and am left wondering why the author made her into such a monster. The author presented her as a selfish, childish, petulant diva as seen through her completely uncompassionate son's eyes. Perhaps this is exactly the dynamic the author wanted to portray, but I found it offensive and overdone.

Sadly, Palma is not the only woman being demonized in this book. Perhaps the author had some traumatic event involving mothers, because Ivy's mother is also absent, having abandoned her. This abandonment left Ivy emotionally damaged (by her own estimation). At one point when Ivy is explaining to Theo that her outbursts are due to this abandonment, she asks him how he would feel if he didn't even have a mother; "Sounds okay to me." He thought about what it would be like to come home to quiet every day, to regulate

meals and freedom and people who were taking care of their own business." REALLY? While I understand that the novel is trying to portray adolescent angst in a complicated family, I think this goes too far and is just too hurtful.

The book perpetuates the idea that the woman/mother should be the one to mostly cook and care for children, and that a working mother (in this case an artist) is to be looked down upon as not fulfilling her womanly duties. Both fathers in the story (as well as the protagonist) are the nurturing good guys (I'll get to Ivy below). Ugh. Why couldn't there be SOME redeeming qualities in Palma?

My last disappointment is again with Ivy. As well as her moodiness I mentioned above, her self-start business (good for her, she has some business sense) is of course in a completely accepted domain for a character who is a young woman: cooking and caring for people. While I liked this character at the beginning of the book when she stood up to Theo, defended deaf culture and helped Theo stop being ashamed of it and his family, I became disillusioned when they began flirting. The romance part of the novel could have been sweet. I was drawn into it until this interaction:

Ivy: "We should go. It's cold and dark out here."

Theo: "Need I remind you, this walk was your idea. Cold and dark was just fine with you not so long ago."

Ivy: "Don't you know better than to expect a female to be consistent?"

Ugh ugh. It's bad enough to (again) perpetuate a stereotype; using the word FEMALE instead of girl/woman adds to the insult.

I got frustrated enough to skim to the end, hoping that there was some kind of shift in the Theo/Palma dynamic. Unfortunately, she becomes catatonic (great, now take away her "voice") and then invisible in the end of the book. I am reminded of Theo's earlier answer about living without a (big, bad, evil, diva) mom: SOUNDS OKAY TO ME. I guess he got what he wanted.

I had hoped for so much more from this book. I think it totally missed the mark on so many levels. A young adult book that is meant to help the reader understand complicated family dynamics and adolescence in a non-traditional family (2 languages, disabilities, etc) should not be so full of misogyny.

Cara Salazar says

The book, *Of Sound Mind* by Jean Ferris, was an interesting realistic fiction about the life of a teenager with a deaf family. This book was recommended to me by a couple of friends, and after reading it I can see why this book was highly regarded by my friends. Upon starting the book, I found it to be very interesting. As the book progressed and the storyline became more intricate my interest in the book also grew. However, the book also felt a bit cluttered with needless information. For example, it would state a lot of information about Theo and Ivy's relationship problems. I felt that the additional information took away from the main point of the book and could have been confusing to the reader. While the relationship between Thomas, Theo's dad, and Palma, Theo's mom, is important, it is given too much attention as it ends up taking away from the book's storyline rather than adding to it. Many characters did not add anything to the book, for example, Theo's friends are introduced at the beginning of the book and then never brought up again. This makes the book feel a bit rushed as the introduction of these new characters could have been better developed. One of the things that the book did well was being able to address the difference between the hearing world and the deaf world. The book did this well as it clearly showed the different relationships that came from the two worlds, the hearing world with Harry and Hazel (family friends of Theo) and the deaf world with Theo and

his family. The book truly did build a bridge between the hearing and deaf worlds. The book showed how the deaf and hearing communities felt about different things. For example, how people in the hearing world found Palma's art to be intriguing and they bought it as they found it to be a novelty, but the deaf community bought it because they felt it was an accomplishment for the whole deaf community. The characters were described as very realistic in the book, making them more relatable. Since the plot line of growing up in a deaf family is not something everyone can relate to, it is nice that the characters are easy to connect to. Theo is shown to be a normal senior, aside from coming from a deaf family, and he is moody but kind. Ivy (a hearing girl, with a deaf dad) is a typical optimist, she seems to have it all figured out, but in reality she is going through all the typical drama, while trying to find herself in high school. Upon meeting, both Ivy and Theo felt a connection with each other since their families a the common characteristic of being deaf. While all the other characters are relatable too, Theo and Ivy are the most relatable to me. An example of another relatable character is Palma, Theo's mother, who starts out as a selfish woman who only cares about herself and her career. We can all relate to her childish view of the world in the beginning of book where she believes the world revolves around her, but by the end she turns into a caring and loving mother. This symbolises one of the greater coming of age stories in the book, and also it symbolizes real motherhood, in how you go into it and how you come out. Overall, I found this book to be a great read, if you enjoy reading books about unique families and coming of age books. People who enjoyed the show Switched at Birth will also enjoy this book.

Irene says

Now I know what critics mean by raw. march 17, 2009

Rereading, I have a lot more to add. It's interesting, the premise. Being the only hearing kid in a deaf family. I didn't appreciate how caring the main character is, and how cruel and selfish the mom is. And I really felt the heartbreak when the dad died. And I was very glad about the ending. It was riveting, I couldn't put it down. Read it in a day.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Me for TeensReadToo.com

For Theo, dealing with deafness is simply a way of life. Being the only hearing person in a family that includes a deaf father, deaf mother, and deaf younger brother has taken it's toll on Theo--he doesn't have his own life, not really, since he's always dealing with interpreting for his family. His mother, Palma, is a famous sculptor, and she depends on Theo to make her phone calls, deal with galleries, and basically do anything and everything that she asks. His father, Thomas, is a furniture maker who was born being able to hear but lost his hearing later in life. Thomas hates asking Theo for anything, trying his best to communicate with hearing people on his own. His younger brother, Jeremy, needs Theo's help almost daily with his fifth-grade homework. For Theo, life is pretty much divided into two categories--talking with his voice to people who can hear, and talking with his hands to those who can't.

But then Theo meets Ivy, a girl in his school who can also hear and sign. Her father is deaf, but her mother, who abandoned the family long ago, was able to hear. Ivy is a nurturer with her own small catering business, and soon her world is intertwined with Theo's. Her dad, who builds model airplanes for a hobby, even gets Thomas and Jeremy interested, and soon they're getting together as often as they can.

Then tragedy strikes when Theo's dad has a stroke. Suddenly, his demanding, diva-ish mother is acting even more incompetent than usual, refusing to even be alone in the same room as her husband once he comes home. Theo is forced to do everything from making sure his brother gets fed and off to school to hiring new caretakers for his father every time his mother fires one.

Then Ivy comes up with a plan--what about having Harry and Hazel, a brother and sister that Ivy caters for, come and take care of Thomas? They've been learning sign language from Ivy, and they know enough to communicate. Soon things are finally running smoothly in Theo's household, until tragedy strikes yet again.

OF SOUND MIND was such an interesting read, I didn't stop until I was finished. What would it be like, I wondered, to be the only hearing person in my house? What would it take to forget about being a kid and take on the responsibilities at such a young age that Theo had to, like negotiating the buying of his house at age eleven? What would I do if I believed my family couldn't survive without me? When does something like being deaf stop defining who you are?

Jean Ferris answers all these questions and more with OF SOUND MIND--a truly great book for people of all ages.

Emma Donovan says

This past month, I read of sound mind by Jean Ferris. The book was an insightful look into the world of children with deaf parents or CODAs. As a sign language student, it is important to keep this struggle of living in both the hearing and deaf world in mind as I continue to study deaf culture.

Though Of Sound Mind was not the best written book I've ever read, The plot was still unique and interesting and kept me intrigued. The book also showed the reader how people in deaf cultures feel about their deafness or ability to sign, as shown on page 42 when one of the main characters, Theo, shares how being able to sign makes him feel weird and he believes that people judge him for it while another main character, Ivy, shares her insight into her immense pride in sign language by saying "if your first language was french instead of sign, would you feel the same way?" and this is first time that deaf pride and deaf modesty is shown but will be brought up many times in the book and almost brings about a main theme in the story as well.

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone interested in deaf culture and even to anyone looking for an easy read.

Diane Mueller says

Since I sign and I have cousins who are hearing impaired I was drawn to this book. One of my dearest friend's daughter told me how hard it was growing up signing for her mother all the time. She loved her mother but felt she had missed her childhood, I never could fully understand how hard it was for her. I thought her mother was the greatest. Reading this book opens my eyes a bit to being a hearing child from a deaf family. I know my friend's daughter told me of having to sign for her mother at her OB appointments when she was only 8 years old and couldn't understand what all her mother or the Doctor were talking about. I didn't care for the mother in this book and felt she was very demanding on her son with no care for his needs. It wrapped up fairly quickly at the end. Good book but not my favorite.

Haven says

Personal Response:

I liked this book because it was about a boy whose family depended on him to survive. I feel like this sometimes because I have to make sure no one is hurting my sister. So I can relate to him.

Plot:

The book is about a boy in high school who wants to go off to MIT. He is really good at math but because his parents are both deaf and need him to help them communicate he doesn't think he will be able to go. His mom leans on him the most, she is a sculptor and she want him to do everything she wants him to do right away. A new girl comes to his school and she also has a deaf parent. She tells him not to let them control his life and to do what he wants to do with his life. He starts to think that maybe she is right but then his dad has a stroke and his family needs him more than ever. His mom can't do anything and his little brother needs him because his parents are not there to take care of him. Eventually Ivy helps him find people to help his dad and also the rest of the family so maybe he can go to MIT.

Characters:

Theo is the main character, he takes care of helping his parents communicate and get along with other people. He is very smart and good at math and wants to go to college. He gets the help his family needs so he will be able to go to college. Ivy is the new girl who comes to his school. She shows him how to get other people to help his family so they don't have to depend on him so much. Theo's mom is a sculptor and she leans on Theo to communicate with other artists and museum people to show her work. She is a very demanding person, but when Theo's dad has a stroke she can't seem to do anything anymore.

Recommendation:

I would recommend this book to both boys and girls who are between the ages of twelve and eighteen. This book will show them how to keep working so you can achieve your dreams and how to ask for help when you need it. This book also shows how different families work out their problems to find solutions that will work for everyone.

Jackson Allen says

Of Sound mind is a book about friendships, heartbreaks, adventure, and a little bit of drama. The main character Theo Henry which the story is told through and his friend Ivy are both seniors in High School. They are your two average Joes. Theo, the anti social nerd who loves math, and dreams to go to MIT. Ivy is the creative girl who loves to cook and art. I always found it funny how two kids who are so different become such good friends. Well there is one thing about Theo, and Ivy have in common that makes them different from everyone else. Both of them are CODA, which means both of them are hearing but their parents are not. They both help interpret for their parents when they go out like the bank or doctor. Theo also helps his brother Jeremy with homework and help with his company. Theo feels embarrassed about it because it makes him feel different and he wants to be just like everyone else. He also feels like he is his mom's servant and has to everything she asks him to in a heartbeat. His dad is usually the one back theo up against his mother. Ivy loves being a CODA child and she feels proud of it and thinks theo should too and not let his mom control his life. They both go through some of the hardest and most stressful times of their lives going through senior year. Theo doesn't want to leave for college because he feels his parents need him

and Ivy is going through the stress to get into college. You will find some finger biting moments and conflicts that happened during the story and Even a couple of heat breaks.

Personally I did not love the book. I knew from the start how the ending was going to go and I feel that there were a lot of boring chapters of just nothing happening. I also did not like the ending of the book because i feel like it left off on a sad and boring note. What i did like about the book was that I could really relate to what Theo was going through because I am also in High School and he is going through the same problems as me. For example trying to manage school,family, and friends all at once. I also like how the book shows us the lifestyle of kids who are CODA and deaf culture. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about ASL culture and the lifestyle is like for CODA kids. I also recommend it to kids from 15 and up, and people who like drama shows and books.

Jill says

This book isn't so much about being deaf or having deaf parents while being hearing, so much as it is about the deeper themes of belonging, being needed, and responsibility to yourself vs. your family. I liked that the author put the main character, Theo in a caregiving role, since statistically it is the female members of a family who step up to fill that role. It left me with a happy feeling at the end, without being too sappy or unrealistic. I read it in about 4 hours and felt satisfied. It also made a nice updated companion to In This Sign which I am also currently reading. The styles are very different, but the parts about being deaf and moving through the world (and using hearing children as interpreters, for better or worse) were similar, showing how in some cases very little has changed since the '70s.
