



The Heart and Mind of Frances Pauley

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Eleven-year-old Frances is an observer of both nature and people, just like her idol, the anthropologist Margaret Mead. She spends most of her time up on the rocks behind her house in her "rock world," as Alvin, her kindhearted and well-read school bus driver, calls it. It's the one place where Frances can truly be herself, and where she doesn't have to think about her older sister, Christinia, who is growing up and changing in ways that Frances can't understand.

But when the unimaginable happens, Frances slowly discovers that perhaps the world outside her rugged, hidden paradise isn't so bad after all, and that maybe--just maybe--she can find connection and camaraderie with the people who have surrounded her all along.

The Heart and Mind of Frances Pauley Details

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From Reader Review The Heart and Mind of Frances Pauley for online ebook

Lisa says

This was an enjoyable read about Frances aka Figgrotten as she works to find herself. She is in 7th grade and she is struggling with her identity. Her stable home life has allowed her to grow up expressing her individuality and she is successful as an outdoor enthusiast and budding life scientist or possibly social scientist. Early teen years are difficult to negotiate as Figgrotten soon learns. Her sister is positively vicious and it hurts! Giggling, mean girls at school are knocking her confidence. Thank goodness she still has her best friend Alvin, the bus driver. That sentence makes it sound creepy, but trust me Alvin is not creepy at all. He is kind and gentle, and thinks from the heart. This book is full of all the wonderful things we hope adults will discuss with children! My hope is that a teacher at my school reads it to her class (3rd grade or older) and has those discussions about acceptance of ourselves and others. Also, discussions about how we can deal with our emotions because part of Figgrotten's identity crisis involves her inability to effectively express her emotions. This was such a good book, and I hope to hear from adults who will share it with children.

Destinee Sutton says

A quiet story about a memorable kid on the edge of becoming more self-aware. Frances Pauley calls herself Figgrotten though nobody else does (it reminded me of George because the close third person narration describes the main character as she sees herself, not necessarily as the world sees her).

Figgrotten is beautifully (enviously) un-self-conscious when the story begins. She wears the same thing every day and just wants to be outside all the time observing nature. Her favorite person is the very old man who drives her school bus.

As the story unfolds Figgrotten/Frances changes significantly and believably into a kid who takes an interest in her appearance and children her own age. Her relationship with her older sister evolves from hostile to understanding.

There's a death in this story that made me tear up, but I don't think this is a book about dealing with grieving a lost loved one as much as it's a story about how young hearts and minds change in the tumultuous tween years.

This also kind of randomly make me think of Jeremy Draws a Monster because it's also about a creative but lonely kid who finds his way to friends by the end of the book.

Amy says

Middle grade novel about a quirky middle schooler dealing with school, family, learning to form friendships, and growing up. The pacing was a bit slow, and the repeating of the main characters self given nickname every few sentences got old, but as a quick read, it made a good audio book to listen to at work.

Barbara says

Eleven-year-old Frances Pauley finds school especially hard this year. Francis prefers to call herself Figgrotten, and she draws inspiration from the example of anthropologist Margaret Mead as she observes the world around her and her classmates. She even has a poster of Lucy, a four-million year old skeleton, in her room, and her interests are nothing like anyone else's in her small town. Not only is Francis different from her classmates because of how she likes to spend her free time, but her older sister, Christinia, seems determined to put some distance between the two of them, leaving her even more confused and lonely than she was before. After the death of Alvin, the school bus driver who she considers her best friend, Francis realizes that there are others in her community and school who might be worthy of her trust and just might understand her and allow her to be herself. This was a touching middle grade novel about trying to remain true to oneself amid the social pressure that emanates from others in middle school and how those we love the most may have the power to wound us deeply, but they also have the ability to help us heal. I really appreciated Christinia's comments at Alvin's funeral service and how Frances's initial assessment of the new bus driver, Kevin Plank, turns out to be completely wrong. Perhaps her thoughts about some of her classmates may turn out to be just as wrong, and she will give more of them, and not just Fiona and James, a chance to get to know her. Ultimately, she realizes that it is possible to be true to oneself while letting others into one's life, an important lesson for her future. I was pleased to see that she didn't compromise herself too much in her need for friendship.

Diane Magras says

Figgrotten, as Frances Pauley has named herself, is a kid that certain young readers will instantly connect with. She's odd, but in ways that kids like her will understand and appreciate, as there's really no one like her in #kidlit. She's brilliant, and extremely sensitive. She loves doing her homework, yet spends a lot of time staring out the window at school, daydreaming about being outside. She loves the outdoors, and feels in her place there. A particular spot up in the rocks is her safe place where she feeds crows in wonderful scenes, connecting with the corvids gently—as a fellow creature, not taming, just connecting. I loved this quiet book and admired its slow build of tension: in Figgrotten's relationship with her older sister, which grows fiercely hostile in a chillingly real way; in her close friendship with her well-read bus driver that ends with loss when he suffers a heart attack; and her relationships at school when a new smart kid threatens her self-identity. I spent a good third of this book with tears in my eyes. So much of it brought me back to hard moments of my own middle school years. A marvelous, powerful, real story that, despite its quiet, will roar inside its readers.

Jo Oehrlein says

Figgrotten seems real, with all the bad and good feelings that kids have. I liked how she got to feel them -- the sadness, the jealousy, the sibling issues, but that she also managed to work through them. Well, the sadness (at least the sadness due to grief) is going to be there for a while, but.....

Mr. Stanley is a tribute to amazing teachers everywhere and how even amazing teachers can't get it right all the time for all kids.

Kudos to Fiona and her mom for reaching out to Figgrotten and to Figgrotten for reaching out to James.

I love the great examples we see of how to make a positive difference in one person's day.

Figgrotten's mom is incredible. She's so supportive and has obviously made choices that work for their family and Figgrotten when picking battles.

Juliana Muñoz says

At begining I was very excited about this book. The main character, Figgrotten, was very interesting, lonely and particular. Her relationship with nature, wildlife and the school bus driver was great. But then it turned predictable... I just felt it very slow (some dialogues are forced and educational, not spontaneous). I loved cover illustration by Sophie Blackall. I wish there were more drawings by her inside the book (not only the crows).

Laura Gardner says

?????????/5 for THE HEART AND MIND OF FRANCES PAULEY by #AprilStevens. I received this book in exchange for a review on the MA youth services blog. All opinions are my own.

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Figgrotten, a white fifth grader whose real name is Frances, lives a lonely life. Her best friend is Alvin, the elderly, contemplative bus driver who drives her to school, she has no friends her own age, she is estranged from her older sister and she spends her afternoon on the rocks behind her house trying to befriend the crows. Her world is rocked to the core when Alvin dies unexpectedly and Figgrotten is despondent. A new friend in her class, a repairing of the relationship with her sister and eventually an acceptance of the death of her friend help Figgrotten move on and find peace.

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This is a beautiful novel, beautifully written and sensitively told. I do think it will be a tough sell at first, but the fortunate readers who pick this book up will be unable to put it down. Figgrotten is a truly unique character who will stay with me for a long time. Students who love nature and the outdoors will find themselves in this book. This is also a great book to give to students looking to learn more about love, loss and forgiveness.

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Stephanie says

Frances (who calls herself "Figgrotten") feels different from the other fifth graders in her class, and from her very normal acting family. She can hardly stand to be indoors, and spends as much time as possible in the rocky hills behind her house, where she studies the world and thinks about her place in it. When her only friend, her 83-year old school bus driver/philosopher Alvin dies, Frances feels lost, and must decide whether she is happy alone, or whether she should take the hands that are reaching out for her. I didn't love this book partly because "Figgrotten" is just not a nice word and I hated reading it over and over, and partly because very little actually happened. Most of the book truly takes place in Frances' heart and mind. But I can see that there are probably readers out there who will really connect with Frances, quiet girls who feel as isolated as

she does, and who will see themselves in her.

Kris says

I absolutely adored *The Heart and Mind of Frances Pauley* from start to finish and already have 3 people that I can't wait to share it with. Frances (or Figgrotten as she prefers) is a 6th grader who loves nature and science and is a great observer of people - though she keeps most at a distance. After suffering the ire of her classmates from answering too many questions, Figgrotten has learned to hide her brilliance from most people with the exception of her thoughtful bus driver and encouraging teacher. She is most happy when she is up in the rock cave in the low cliffs behind her home where she can study nature and breathe. But inevitably life changes are coming for Frances through a terrible standoff with her older sister, a disturbingly precocious new classmate, the death of someone dear to her and the onset of puberty. I hope other readers will enjoy this thoughtful and true book as much as I did.

Karina says

A gorgeous, gorgeous book.

Terrie says

I absolutely had no desire to even read this book when I learned of her self-given nickname (Figgrotten), which is never really explained.

But I am glad I kept on with it because it was a very sweet story of a young girl who is awkward and prefers to be alone, but is very smart. It encompasses a variety of subjects that she has to contemplate and see how she feels about- death of a friend, a new student who she doesn't like, finding out someone is gay, her sister telling lies about her, boyfriends, etc.

I totally loved this book and am glad I kept reading.

Heidi Burkhart says

A remarkably innocent book, for this day and age, about a young girl who is sensitive, academic and doesn't fit in. She learns through experiences, both good and painful, that she is a good person who no longer has to live life from the outside looking in.

The perfect audience would be girls from 4th-7th grade. For those kids who struggle with growing and change it would give them hope that life will get better.

Fats says

In *The Heart and Mind of Frances Pauley*, April Stevens weaves a heartfelt story about siblings, friendship, and coping with loss and grief. Figgrotten is a new character to love.

Ms. Yingling says

Copy graciously provided by the publisher upon request

Frances (who refers to herself as Figgrotten because she likes the way it sounds) has some quirky personality features, including an immense love of nature that causes her to fill her room with branches and sleep with the windows open even in the winter. These quirks irritate her older sister, Christinia, who becomes increasingly antagonistic toward her. Since others also find Frances a bit off putting, this desertion is particularly hard. Luckily, the bus driver on her route, Alvin, is particularly nice and philosophical, and bond over stories of birds and articles Frances reads in the encyclopedia. Frances likes her teacher, who is understanding and fun, but she doesn't like new student James, since he is even smarter than she is and frequently monopolizes the class. When Alvin becomes ill, Frances has a particularly tough time in school, but luckily her parents try to help her, and even Christinia is surprisingly supportive. Eventually, Frances makes friends with Fiona and learns how to deal with change in her life. She even is willing to trade in her too small, cat hair covered coat for a new parka, and even realizes that the replacement bus driver is not as talkative as Alvin because he is shy.

Strengths: Frances' struggles with her sister distancing herself from her are very true to life. By fifth grade, children need to figure out that being quirky often does not work to their advantage, and Frances is one of the few characters in middle grade literature who picks up these clues, makes a few changes to her actions at school, and improves her own life. N.B. I no doubt made many of my own problems in fifth and sixth grade, so I can relate.

Weaknesses: For some reason, Frances being referred to as Figgrotten throughout the book grated on me. Also, this is a more introspective book, so not a lot "happens".

What I really think: This reminded me strongly of Constance Greene's *A Girl Called Al*, and is a gently sad book with more hope than most middle grade books have had lately. I especially thought that Frances' mother was particularly nice, and no doubt long suffering!
