



The Van Gogh Cafe

Cynthia Rylant

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At the Van Gogh Cafe, *anything* can happen. Clara's dad owns the cafe, and she's seen it all--from food that cooks by itself to poems that foretell the future. This award-winning collection of vignettes by Newbery medalist Cynthia Rylant is a treat to be relished. So bring your appetite for the unexpected, because at the Van Gogh Cafe, your order of tea and toast comes with a side of magic!

The Van Gogh Cafe Details

Date : Published September 1st 2006 by HMH Books for Young Readers (first published 1995)

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Author : Cynthia Rylant

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Genre : Fiction, Fantasy, Childrens, Middle Grade

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From Reader Review The Van Gogh Cafe for online ebook

Josiah says

I actually think that this may have deserved some Newbery Honor consideration for 1996. Cynthia Rylant has cooked up a story of not-so-subtle magic that is, nonetheless, difficult to pin down exactly. Ever since lightning struck at the Van Gogh Cafe, special, hard-to-explain things have happened, bringing help to people when they most need it and anticipating future needs before they even arise. This book has a unique style, guided well by the experienced touch of Cynthia Rylant. "The Van Gogh Cafe" is, in my eyes, a nice success.

Rebecca says

A lovely little bit of magical realism in first-chapter format. Sort of like if you know a 3rd grader who, in their adult spirit, would like Garden Spells. I think this would make a great chapter-by-chapter classroom readaloud, too, with the way the chapters chain together.

Ruth E. R. says

Very little value in this book aimed at ages 6-9ish. There is no plot, only ideas. Kids this age are pretty much incapable of comprehending the abstract (on their own), and require (and need) what is concrete. As we know from physiology and history, critical thinking skills present themselves at around age 12. Before that is the best time for the facts to be memorized and soaked up by the unused sponges, which in turn contribute to grownup creative thinking and innovation. First images are the ones that can never be forgotten. With that said, I am curious what motivated the author and the publishers to aim for such a young and vulnerable audience.

Each chapter is a small story featuring transient patrons of the cafe, which I think you will find to be more like Hemingway's Cafe than Van Gogh's. I am disappointed by this book after greatly enjoying the author's Aunt Lucy's Kitchen series.

Also, this is yet another children's book which supports homosexual feelings, openly portrayed and inciting our sympathy and guilt at the "old days" (1940s maybe), when such feelings tended not to be acted upon and were considered indications of mental instability and risky behavior. How does sexual behavior find its way into a pre-puberty book?

Several of the vignettes also make me wonder if the author is a devotee of PETA. Her book is a Radical Liberal's delight, ideal propaganda aimed at those unable to think for themselves.

The only part I liked was on the first page, after stating that the Van Gogh Cafe was built inside a building that was once a theater. "Anyone who has ever seen anything happen on a stage -- anything -- knows that a theater is so full of magic that after years and years of opening nights there must be magic enough to last forever in its walls."

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Carrie Spellman for TeensReadToo.com

The Van Gogh Café is magic. Nobody knows quite how or why, but they all agree that it is. Nobody knows it better than ten-year-old Clara. She helps her dad, Marc, run the café. Clara knows how much the café loves stories, and the small stories don't often stay small for long.

To the people in Flowers, Kansas, who have been going to the café all of their lives, the unbelievable is pretty normal, and the impossible seems quite possible. Anything can happen at the Van Gogh Café.

From lost loves found, to a cat that falls in love with a seagull. From food that cooks itself, to magically multiplying muffins. From prophetic poetry on napkins, to a possum that helps a man find his life again. You never know what you might find at the Van Gogh Café.

I love it!

My only complaint is that it's too short and I want more! My only question is, can I please go visit? Maybe even work there? Oh, that's two questions.

Claire Monahan says

When I was seven or eight years old and home sick from school, my mom brought me two things in bed: a hot cup of Earl Grey tea and this darling book that I always keep nearby. Of all the books in the entire world, this is the one that stole my heart.

Clara is an imaginative, precocious young girl who lives in Flowers, Kansas with her dad. They own a cafe on the main street in town, a cafe that was once a theatre. The magic in those walls still makes funny things happen in the cafe, and Clara notices it all. Like the possum...

Barely 100 pages, this book can easily be read within an hour. Any time I feel upset, sick, depressed, or simply bored with life, I escape to the Van Gogh Cafe. It's a dream of a children's book that will certainly inspire and entertain any adult with an imagination.

Ben Goldberg says

The characters of this book were magical. I felt as though I really knew them. They could be friends. Clara, the cafe owner's, always expected something magical to happen to the cafe. The conflict of his book was between Clara and the cafe. I like how the author wrote each chapter as a different story about the cafe. I thought this made me want to keep reading to figure out what happened next.

Sherry says

Well, not what I expected from Cynthia Rylant, and from many of the reviews posted here and on the book

cover. But, I love Cynthia Rylant's other series and respect her work, and I majored in Art History. It was a must-read. The best vignette here was the final one, the one I remotely saw coming from the outset when Rylant spoke of the magic in the theatre walls. I could also tell that the actor was waiting to expire, not literally waiting for a friend to walk in. This type of mature scenario would go over the heads of most of the book's intended young audience. Quick read.

Selene says

This is a great book to teach reading and writing strategies to students.

Third Read: September 10, 2018 - September 14, 2018

5 Stars

I read this to my new group of 6th graders.

Second Read: October 13, 2017 - November 17, 2017

5 Stars

I read this for the second time for my other grade 6 class.

First Read: September 12, 2017 - September 19, 2017

5 Stars

I read this for the first time for my grade 6 class.

Nancy Kotkin says

A lyrical children's chapter book about a cafe, the man who owns it, his daughter, and various customers. A lovely piece of magical realism infused with hope. I'm not completely satisfied by the ending, which is not as original as the rest of this quaint story. Also, I expected the name of the cafe to have some special meaning to the character(s), but it doesn't have any significance within the story. Still, this book is a short, enjoyable read. Would make a good writing prompt/exercise for upper elementary or middle school students.

Shoa Khan says

The writer sits a long time watching people come and go. He watches their faces change when they enter the Van Gogh Cafe - the tiredness lift, the worry relax, the hurry slow down.

They come in and they are kind and modest and funny.

This is the story of a bewitching little cafe located in Flowers, Kansas. There was once a theater where now the cafe stands, and that is believed to be the reason for all the magic that seems to be oozing out of the very walls of this place.

The short little story was lined with a series of magical events, that make you want to keep reading it. In just the few hours that it took me to read the book in its entirety, I felt like I was transported to the magical cafe and witnessing all the events first-hand!

#SundaySpentWell :D

Rebecca McGoldrick says

We love this book! It's a very good book. It's funny. It's perfect for children who really love funny stories, adventures, and magic. It's safe to read. There are no bad words or scary things. There is only one sad part.

If you liked the book Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman, you'll like this one because Seedfolks really connects to this book because each chapter is about someone new but it still makes a good story. At the end it all comes together to make a book that you will really enjoy.

We would give it more than five stars if we could.

Hope you're ready for for funny things in this book! Hope you read it!

From four third graders at Shepardson Elementary in Fort Collins, Colorado

Yana says

I found the cover of the book very intriguing when I walked past it in my school library. I wasn't disappointed- it *is* a very interesting book. Completes a few of my challenges too.

Linda Lipko says

This is a book that confirms my love of the creativity of Rylant.

The Van Gogh Cafe is magical and there is no doubt about that for ten year old Clara.

Her father owns the cafe and she helps to dispense the food to those who visit.

Once a theater, perhaps some of the magic remains. While Clara's father pens poems on napkins, the food cooks itself, including marvelous lemon pies.

Muffins wrapped in foil and left by a previous movie star have the power to heal. A possum hangs upside down near the window of the cafe and gives purpose to a disillusioned man who opens a shelter for lost animals; a Emerald the cat falls in love with the sea gull who appeared mysteriously in Flowers, Kansas!

This is a delightful, soft, wonderfully written tale. I loved it!!!

Dawn says

Not only does the magic renew Clara's (the 10 year-old who helps her father run the Van Gogh Cafe) hope and add a rainbow splash of color to her life, but the magic between Marc (Clara's father) and Clara struck

me as inspiring, too. Marc and Clara share the work, and share the magic: The father and daughter make an interesting, enjoyable team to read about, from the time lightning struck the Cafe, to the time they met a very special writer and all the times in between. It seems Clara expects good things (magic) to happen, and that expectation is contagious to readers as they can't wait to find out what happens next in this book (which is a quick and easy read - it was over too soon). It's easy to get involved in The Van Gogh Cafe, and easy to find hope and cheer there.

Amy says

This book was first introduced to me during a literature workshop for teachers. It was read aloud to us and I fell in love with everything about the book. I have been reading it aloud to my fifth grade class ever since and it remains a delightful and powerful story. There is always the "event"-- something magical that happens and then there is "the bigger story" that needs a little patience to reveal itself and then there is the "author's message" -- what is the meaning of the magic. All the stories become part of the enchanting cafe. Do these events really happen or are they the imaginings of Clara? There is so much to discuss about life, hope, kindness, friendship and love in this short book! Read it to be delighted!
