

VENTURA BOOK REVIEWS

WHERE WILL THE NEXT BOOK TAKE YOU?

ORPHAN TRAIN

BY CHRISTINA BAKER KLINE



“I’ve learned that for a book to become a No. 1 best-seller – unless the author is a blockbuster commercial success already – there must be a perfect storm of factors: timing, theme, cover image, publisher support, book-club enthusiasm. If it were easy to predict or replicate, publishers would make it happen more often. This novel clearly hit a nerve: I wrote about a moment in American history that has been hidden in plain sight.”

This was Kline’s response when asked, “Generally, what do you see as the factors that influence a novel’s success?” (Being A Writer). Kline’s novel *Orphan Train* sat on the New York Times bestseller list for more than two years and although it could have been due to all the things she listed, it also could have lingered there simply because it was a really good book.

I’ll get my small grievance out of the way first. My biggest pet peeve while reading is when the protagonist loves to read and/or write. I just find that to be an easy character trait for an author to give their main character. It might have made the novel a bit better if the girl, Molly, was a little more gothic and less nerdy.

Now that that is out of the way, *Orphan Train* was an absorbing and exciting novel to read. The novel is written from two points of view – Molly’s and Vivian’s. Vivian is an older woman whom Molly is helping clean out her attic in order to complete community service hours. Although they are two completely different people from different time periods, they are very similar. Both women have had rough childhoods; they grew up fending for themselves and not feeling like they belonged anywhere.

Vivian is a very likable character and grows even more likable by the end of the novel. Kline wrote her in perfectly and reading the dialogue is nearly the same as if you were a fly on the wall listening in. There are many scenes that make it seem like the reader could have been there since it was described so well. The reader can feel the pain of loss and abandonment for both of the women. Kline uses the characters and their experiences to weave life lessons into the novel. My favorite is from one of Vivian’s chapters. It reads, “My da used to say it’s good to test your limits now and then, learn what the body is capable of, what you can endure.” As the book goes on, life changes in both stories. The reader can start to see how the characters wound up where they are and can identify when the women begin to feel wanted and like they have a *home*.

I would love to be in a book club and discuss this novel in further detail since I feel like there is so much to talk about and I can’t put all of it into a review, especially because I don’t want to add in any spoilers. *Orphan Train* was published in 2013. Kline has also written six other novels including *Orphan Train Girl*, an adaptation of *Orphan Train* for younger readers. I look forward to reading more from this author.

"Being A Writer." *Christina Baker Kline Author Website*, christinabakerkline.com/q-a/being-a-writer/#3. Accessed 19 Feb. 2018.

REVIEWED BY GRACE VENTURA