



Johnny Swanson

Eleanor Updale

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Johnny Swanson Details

Date : Published May 2010 by David Fickling Books (first published April 29th 2010)

ISBN : 9780385616423

Author : Eleanor Updale

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Young Adult, Childrens, Middle Grade, Chapter Books, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review Johnny Swanson for online ebook

Anne Miguel says

A fun mystery, but don't read it late at night or when you're by yourself!

Eleni says

A cute, award-winning children's book that has it all; humour, history, mystery and adventure, with a totally lovable character.

Lyn says

It's taken a long time to read this book aloud to Class 5 (now Class 6) but that is no reflection on its quality. An exciting, funny and poignant book set in the 1920s, it was much enjoyed by the class.

Suad Shamma says

This was a thoroughly entertaining read for me. It's quite bulky for a YA mystery novel, but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

It started out a little slow as it set the stage for the murder that occurs halfway through the book, by introducing us to Johnny Swanson, his very unpopular life at school, the financial hardships he faces at home with his mother who had to take on extra work to make ends meet, and on top of all that his own personal difficulties. Johnny made the mistake of stealing money from his mother's money jar to respond to an ad that promised to give him the secret to becoming taller (as he leans towards being small for his age). In order to respond to this ad without alerting anyone to what he was doing, not only did he steal the money from his mother, but he's had to create an imaginary aunt to pull it off. He then realized that the ad was a scam, and in his devastation at all he's been through to respond to it he comes up with an even better idea - making his own scam adverts in the newspaper to make money that would help him and his mother, but that meant keeping imaginary Aunt Ada in the picture.

From then on, a full series of events take place leading up to the murder of the town Doctor, and accusing Johnny's mother of the act. It is now up to Johnny and Hutch - ex-army man managing the shop Johnny works at - to prove otherwise.

As already mentioned, a very entertaining mystery read. I kind of figured out who did it from the very beginning, but it was still very interesting to see the whole thing unfold through the eyes of a young boy, and watch his transformation and the development of his character through to the end.

Katie Fitzgerald says

It is 1929, and Johnny and his mother live in an English village where money is scarce. Johnny delivers newspapers, but he wishes he could contribute more to the family's savings, especially now that the rent is being raised. When he is fooled by an advertisement in the paper promising to sell him the "secret to instant height" inspiration strikes. Soon he is running his own ads and making money off of innocent people who believe he will send them instant cures to whatever ails them. While Johnny does his best to get away with his petty crimes, a much greater offense is committed in another part of town. Dr. Langford, who has been working in secret to bring a tuberculosis vaccine to England, is found murdered, and Johnny's own mother is the lead suspect! With his mother being held in jail, and only his boss at the newspaper to look after him, Johnny realizes he must take matters into his own hands. Even if it means coming clean about his own criminal acts, he won't let his mother hang for murder!

Johnny Swanson is one of the most interesting children's historical fiction novels I have ever read. I think American kids will find it especially interesting because they probably haven't been taught very much about what things were like in Europe while the Great Depression was beginning here in the U.S. Seeing the threat of tuberculosis and the perils of poverty through Johnny's eyes really brings them to life and makes it easier for kids to empathize with people living through events that might otherwise seem remote, or even irrelevant. The mystery elements, too, are intriguing, and even kids who don't care much for history won't be able to resist watching Johnny solve a murder. Kids will also like the get-rich-quick scheme Johnny creates with the newspapers, and they will worry, as he does, about the girl in his class whose family suddenly falls ill with TB.

This book is well-written and interesting from the beginning, almost right up until the end. The ending is really the only thing that disappointed me, and it was mostly because it didn't do justice to the rest of the story. What happens is predictable and contrived, and it ties things up much more neatly than is really necessary. I'm all for a happy ending - and I think kids generally are, too - but it always strikes me as inauthentic when every last string is tied up in a neat bow. That said, the cheesiness of the ending doesn't take away from the overall reading experience. The final moments feel more like an epilogue than an actual part of the story proper, and I chose to treat them as I did the epilogue of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - which is to say, I ignore them in favor of the things I enjoyed.

Johnny Swanson will appeal to readers who enjoy 20th century history. Pair it with Great Depression titles such as *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, *Moon Over Manifest* by Clare Vanderpool, and *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis. It might also be interesting to include in a unit of study about newspapers, along with *The Landry News* by Andrew Clements, *The Candy Smash* by Jacqueline Davies, and the *Dear Know-It-All* series by Rachel Wise.

Elle says

This book is utterly fabulous, from the informative historical setting to the lovable characters to the mystery and intrigue and love. Set in the early 1900's, it tells the story of a scrawny boy with a father who died in the war, Johnny Swanson, and his struggles to help his mom and himself survive with little money. What I didn't expect at all was that this book is a mystery with exciting plot twists. The story centers around familial love, friendship, and learning to do what is right even in trying circumstances. I loved it so much.

Sibooys says

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Margo Tanenbaum says

Eleanor Updale, the award-winning author of the popular Montmerancy series, takes us to England in 1929 in her newest historical mystery novel for young people. Our hero, Johnny Swanson, is an engaging young boy who finds himself mixed up in a murder mystery--and his own mother is the suspected murderer! Johnny's sure as can be that she's not guilty, but no one will believe him and the police seem to have already made up their mind. Can Johnny save her before it's too late?

There seem to be three interrelated stories going on in this novel--the above-mentioned murder mystery, the tuberculosis epidemic in England, and Johnny's many schemes to make money to help out his mother. Johnny is enticed by a newspaper advertisement promising the "secret of instant height," just what he needs to stop the bullying at school because of his small stature. When he discovers the ad is a hoax, he decides he can play that game also, and soon is concocting schemes to put advertisements in various publications and collecting small sums of money for bogus answers to problems. As you might imagine, Johnny becomes hopelessly entangled in a comical web of lies around his business, this part of the story very much reminded me of the classic Great Brain series by John D. Fitzgerald that I enjoyed as a child.

At the same time, a TB outbreak is plaguing England, and Johnny's neighbor, Dr. Langford, just might be working on a secret vaccine for the disease. This work turns out to be dangerous, indeed--for Dr. Langford and maybe for Johnny too, as he learns more than he should know about the undercover work.

Johnny makes an appealing boy detective--a character who's far from perfect, but whose good intentions shine through as he works to help his mother, first through his financial schemes, and then to save her from the hangman's noose. The author combines humor and suspense--a winning combination for young mystery fans. Perhaps we will see more adventures of Johnny Swanson in the future!

Ringo The Cat says

Eleanor Updale is probably most known for the Montmorency series. In Johnny Swanson, set in London in 1929, with a couple of actual historical places (the Welsh Craig-y-Nos sanatorium) and events (TB scare, importance of newspaper ads) in the background, she also takes the historical fiction route and introduces us to 11-year-old Johnny, the shortest boy in his class, and the unlikely hero of this crime adventure.

The shortest boy in his class, Johnny decides to 'borrow' money from his mother's Peace Mug to send a letter to the person who seems to have answer to the "secret to instant height". When he receives a note advising him to "stand on a box", he is too embarrassed that he was tricked, to tell his mother. The ad trick

(he saw the ad in the local paper), though, does inspire Johnny to start running his own advert scam to gain back the money that he borrowed from his mother and then some... Johnny has the best of intentions but it soon spins out of control and he finds himself inventing a sick Aunt Ada who supposedly lives in with Johnny and his mom. The actual crime part of the book doesn't start until well into the second half when the retired town doctor Langdon ends up dead... somehow everything is related to a recent TB scare and the invention of a vaccine and Johnny even finds himself at the heart of the murder mystery when his mother Winnie is arrested. As he feels responsible (if he hadn't started the ad scam, his mother wouldn't have been upset with Johnny and run out of the house in the first place), he is desperate to clear her name, which he tries to do together with shopkeeper Hutch.

The first part of the novel in which we get to know Johnny is definitely the strongest part. I feel that the events of the murder mystery are all a little bit too convenient and too coincidental. I'm sure that the reason for this is that it's aimed at a younger audience, but still... it's all a bit too neatly tied up for the cat... Johnny Swanson is still a nice book though, although the beginning promised more than just nice. Kids interested in a great adventure story with a very likeable main character will be in for a treat.

<http://ringothecat.wordpress.com/>

Ms. Yingling says

Johnny's life in rural 1929 England is difficult, but it's about to get worse. He's picked on by classmates, and his hard-working, widowed mother works as much as she can cleaning houses to keep up with the rent, but it's not enough. Johnny, having been fleeced by an ad himself, decides to start placing ads in the paper for people to send in a shilling or two for advice, to which he replies with things that are not very helpful. He invents an "Aunt Ada" to cover his tracks at the newspaper and post office. Just as things are looking up a bit (his mother gets a job at a TB sanitarium and money comes in from his ads), a local doctor is killed and Johnny's mother is arrested.

With the help of Hutch, the local shopkeeper, Johnny tries to investigate, and comes across a nasty plot involving the doctor's wife and a TB vaccine that is being developed. Also instrumental are Olwen, a classmate whose family died of TB, and a reporter.

Strengths: A lovely picture of post WWI England, a time that is rarely covered in books. The village characters are great fun, and their interactions amusing. Is the world a better or worse place without people like nosy Miss Dangerfield? The mystery, which of course only Johnny can solve, is fraught with enough peril to keep readers going.

Weaknesses: Students may not pick this up on their own, and need to know that the mystery doesn't start until well into the book. Updale's other series, Montmorency, is well received but needs to be handed to students and explained.

Andrea says

I loved this children's/young adult novel by Eleanor Updale. The novel was set in late 1920's England. I liked

the mystery mixed with historical fiction and history. Johnny Swanson is a great character, and there are many others who are well loved. I found the TB plot of the story to be very interesting and informative. I think that this book may be a little too much for little people though. I would say it is much more YA/adult than children's.

Barbara says

One of the things I love about this author's books--she also wrote the wonderful Montmorency series--is that they are like nothing else being published these days. Her characters are interesting and stick with you after you finish the book. So it is with this one. Eleven-year-old Johnny Swanson is desperate to help his mother out financially in 1929 England. After he is fooled by a come-on advertisement in the local paper, he decides to write his own ads and earn some money. As he does so, he weaves a complicated set of lies that threaten to engulf him. Additionally, a tuberculosis epidemic has many of the town's citizens in a dither, and a doctor who has been working with some of those who are ill and quarantined ends up murdered. Due to circumstantial evidence and some gossipy neighbors who see guilt where there is none, Johnny's mother is arrested for the crime. When the police refuse to listen to Johnny's suspicions, he must take matters into his own hands. This book read seamlessly, revealing quite a lot about human nature along the way. I want more from this author! She has the gift of delivering powerful messages in well-told stories, and while I wasn't surprised at the ending, I certainly enjoyed the ride.

Andrew Schultz says

I just finished reading and enjoying Updale's Montmorency series when I found she'd written this, too. I think it's even better.

Johnny, the main character, perpetrates a bit of mail fraud after being a victim himself. He sends money for advice, which turns out to be a paper with an unfunny joke. But he is too ashamed to do anything about it. Then he figures adults might be, too, and since he needs some extra money, he finds he is good at writing ads and shoveling out more "advice."

All this eventually ties up with a murder mystery, and what I really like about this book is how Johnny's scheme isn't glossed over at the end--he sees how and why it's wrong--but it plays a part in catching the criminal and he's also earned forgiveness in a way, not just from the postmaster who half figures what he's using a post office box for, but from the reader.

I've read a lot of young adult literature that sweeps worse than what Johnny did under the rug, starring older characters and being meant for older readers, which leaves me groaning. Johnny Swanson throws in a lot of maturity with its playfulness and is a very quick read, too.

Kathryn says

The title character, Johnny, hates being short so when he sees an advert in the newspaper that promises the secret to tallness he steals some money off his mum to send away for the secret. Unfortunately this is a con, but it gives Johnny an idea for his own money-making scheme to help pay back the money he stole and to

help his mum pay the rent. He places his own adverts in the paper to trick people into sending him money. Some of his adverts were really clever and funny, and even though he was technically breaking the law I really wanted his plans to work.

Later on the focus of the book shifts as a murder is committed and Johnny's mum is the prime suspect. Johnny knows he must clear his mum's name, even if it means risking getting into trouble himself.

The book is set in 1929 and a lot of the story is centred around Tuberculosis and the treatment of the disease. This historical aspect made for interesting reading and I certainly learned some facts about TB that I didn't know before. But the book is so much more than just a historical story, it's a fun mystery story with a fantastic character who I couldn't help but love.

Heather says

I have previously read Ms. Updale's *Montmorency* books, so I came to the book with high expectations. And they were met. This story is similar to the *Montmorency* series in the high use of deception by multiple characters, but is different in almost all other aspects. Johnny and his mom are having financial troubles, and Johnny wishes he could earn some money. He figures that if he were taller, he could get more jobs, so he secretly borrows some of his mother's Christmas money to send off for The Secret to Instant Height, as advertised in the newspaper. When it turns out to be a scam ("Stand on a box"), Johnny is angry and devastated. But then he begins to think that maybe he could make ads like that. And thus begins Johnny's season of deception. But his life of crime is anything but smooth, especially when his deception leads to his mother being suspected of a murder she did not commit! And Johnny is the only one who can free his mother and find the real killer. Fast paced, interesting, and very enjoyable. Johnny, his mother, the doctor, Hutch, and Olwen all make great characters, and the tuberculosis epidemic adds an interesting twist as well as historical context. Highly recommended for fans of mystery or adventure.
