



## The Agony of Alice

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## **The Agony of Alice** Phyllis Reynolds Naylor , Kam Mak (Illustrator)

Life, Alice McKinley feels, is just one big embarrassment. Here she is, about to be a teenager and she doesn't know how. It's worse for her than for anyone else, she believes, because she has no role model. Her mother has been dead for years. Help and advice can only come from her father, manager of a music store, and her nineteen-year-old brother, who is a slob. What do they know about being a teen age girl? What she needs, Alice decides, is a gorgeous woman who does everything right, as a roadmap, so to speak. If only she finds herself, when school begins, in the classroom of the beautiful sixth-grade teacher, Miss Cole, her troubles will be over. Unfortunately, she draws the homely, pear-shaped Mrs. Plotkin. One of Mrs. Plotkin's first assignments is for each member of the class to keep a journal of their thoughts and feelings. Alice calls hers "The Agony of Alice, " and in it she records all the embarrassing things that happen to her.

Through the school year, Alice has lots to record. She also comes to know the lovely Miss Cole, as well as Mrs. Plotkin. And she meets an aunt and a female cousin whom she has not really known before. Out of all this, to her amazement, comes a role model -- one that she would never have accepted before she made a few very important discoveries on her own, things no roadmap could have shown her. Alice moves on, ready to be a wise teenager.

## **The Agony of Alice Details**

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### Farah says

Nggak ada satu orangpun yang pernah bilang sama gue, kalo jadi remaja itu SUSAH.

Lebih susah dari sekedar naik metromini ke melawai, terus ngerjain soal-soal spmb yang hasilnya cuma bisa menjawab 4 pertanyaan buat mata pelajaran matematika yang jumlah soalnya ada.. 25. And double that.

Lebih susah dari sekedar bangun pagi-pagi buta, menyeret badan ke kamar mandi, cuci muka-gosok gigi-pake kaos kaki dan sepatu lari, lalu membuka pintu pagar, nyalain mp3, dan mulai pemanasan. Lari pagi. Selama 3 bulan berturut-turut. And still, you can double that.

Menjadi remaja itu, SUSAH.

Sesusah menahan gejolak cinta yang deritanya tak pernah berakhir.

Menahan godaan untuk TIDAK selalu naksir pada SETIAP remaja cowok yang kakinya panjang, lebih tinggi dari dirinya sendiri, tidak dekil, tidak bau jempol, dan kaos kakinya tidak bolong, YANG LEWAT didepannya. You can ask Patkay for that. Kalo ngga percaya.

Tapi untung ada mama yang membantu gue melewati semua itu dengan baik.

Yang memberi tahu bedanya Laurier kemasan warna hijau dan pink. Dan kemudian menyarankan untuk ganti pake Charm maxi, karena lebih safe. Dan nyaman. Dan ngga iritasi.

Yang dengan segera menyerahkan setumpuk miniset setelah gue mengadu, "tadi pas pelajaran olah raga, DADA aku diliatin melulu ama anak laki2! Lagian ngapain sih gurunya nyuruh lompat2 di tempat? Kurang kerjaan!" \*tendang kursi\*

Yang mlarang ngga boleh main hujan-hujanan di luar lagi. "Karena kamu kan udah ada TETE-nya."  
\*ngejengkang\*

Yang mengenalkan bedak Harum Sari..

Yang membekali sisir, handuk dan baju dalam bersih di hari-hari setiap kali ada pelajaran olah raga.

Yang memilihkan baju baru buat lebaran karena kebanyakan baju saat itu adalah kaos dan jeans. \*mama beringsut pelan. menyerahkan sehelai blazer dengan busa di bahu, dengan rok selutut yang serasi.\* "Nih nanti dipake pas mau ke rumah Bapak (kakek) yah." \*nangis darah\*

Tapi disamping hal-hal tersebut, diantara hal-hal yang membuat hidup seorang remaja menjadi lebih mudah dalam melewati masa-masa puber, bergulat dengan hormonnya yang bergejolak, terkadang ada keputusan yang membuat si remaja nyaris memilih untuk tinggal di kaki Gunung Kilimanjaro. Sendirian. Menempuh perjalanan dengan berjalan kaki. Dari Pondok Gede. Karena tidak sanggup menanggung malu.

Siapa yang bisa menanggung kepedihan hati macam ini? Remaja manapun tidak akan ada yang sanggup.

*Sang ibu menuntunnya dengan senyum sumringah.*

*"Jadi rambut kamu akan dipotong hari ini. Mama ada salon baru. Mama cocok kok potong rambut disitu. Kamu mau ya? Kan sebentar lagi masuk SMP. Biar rambutnya rapih sedikit."*

"Aku ga mau potong rambut! Ga suka salon!"

"Dirapihin aja kok. Janji deh ngga pendek2.."

"Bener ya? Ngga pendek2 ya?"

"Janji"

"Dari dulu aku potong pendek terus rambutnya, sekarang mau panjangin!"

"Iya boleh dipanjangin, tapi asal rapih. Makanya dirapihin. Potong dikit aja."

"Se-dikit apa?"

"satu senti?"

*Si remaja memainkan helai-helai rambutnya sambil berpikir. Satu senti.. berarti.. masih bisa di bawah bahu deh panjangnya. Ia menatap sengit ibunya. Teringat akan dendam lama.*

"Bener ya cuma satu senti?"

"Bener, suwer deh," ibunya mengangkat jari, membentuk huruf V.

*Setengah jam kemudian, sang anak ditemukan sedang menangis di depan pintu salon. Menangisi helai-helai rambutnya yang diamputasi. Menangisi masa depannya. Hari-hari barunya. Mulai saat itu, nama gue tinggallah nama. Nama yang melekat, pada sosok remaja dengan potongan rambut seperti MELISA SEMUT-SEMUT KECIL yang menggelitik bagian belakang lehernya. Seumur kelas 1 SMPnya. Karena tipu muslihat kapster salon, dan ibu kandungnya sendiri."*

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### **Cayla Mcelwee says**

For my summer reading I chose to read the book The Agony of Alice. I really enjoyed this book, and it kept my attention throughout the entire thing. If I could I would rate this book at 4.5 stars, but since I am not able to, I rated it 4. This book was about a girl starting 6th grade at a new school, which was very convenient for me because she is my age, and having the same troubles as me. The Agony of Alice showed all of Alice's troubles like being new, getting a teacher that she didn't want, and not making friends very easily. As I got farther into the book Alice slowly started to progress in the things she needed to work on, and started accepting her teacher, and making friends. While this was happening, Alice was keeping a chart that she would write the things she was going forward with (progressing) and the things she was going backward with (not progressing). At the end of the book Alice was a new person, she had many friends, and was practically her teachers daughter! This book really showed how you can change as a person if you really work hard. This was very good book, and I definitely recommend this book for summer reading. I really enjoyed the book The Agony of Alice, and I look forward to reading farther into the series.

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### **Cheryl says**

Very cute and sweet. No real mean girls, no real dysfunction, no major whining or melodrama... but not too innocent, either. I can definitely see the appeal for some girls. But would I have loved it when I was a pre-teen? I think maybe, but otosh I might not even have picked it up, being more into horse stories and fairy tales at the time.

It got better, richer, after the first several chapters, and I have hopes for the sequel(s). I see there's more titles in the series than I can imagine reading, though, so we'll see.

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## **Elizabeth says**

My favorite childhood book.

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## **Maria says**

The Alice books made such an impact on me growing up, and they still hold up well. I can never believe that these are some of the most banned books in America when they handle growing up in such an innocent and thoughtful way.

Arguably, the lesson of this one is that beauty is on the inside, as observed through Alice's relationship with Mrs. Plotkin. The way their relationship unfolds is very sweet and ties everything together quite nicely.

Observations on a re-read:

I was surprised at all the references to Christianity -- Methodists vs. Catholics, Easter mass, St. Agnes, etc. I don't think I picked up on that when I first read them, and it's another reason I'm so surprised these are banned.

Alice is such an easy character to emphasize with. Her yearning for a replacement mother is so palpable and hard to read.

Alice's first incredibly-detailed Amtrack ride, and definitely not her last.

I love how undramatic these books are. All of Alice's 'agonies' are things we all experience growing up. It's so refreshing to find a heroine whose just a regular girl doing regular things. No special powers or skills or supernatural love interests. This is definitely a book I would want my kids to read.

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## **Pam says**

I couldn't resist the book when I read the back cover:

"Life is like a dumpster. As soon as you get rid of one embarrassment, you pick up another. I knew that this was going to go on forever unless I found someone to set an example for me, and by the time I got the mustard off my shirt, I'd made up my mind: I'd adopt a mother."

Obviously this book was going to amuse me and since Naylor is a Newbery Medal winner for Shiloh, I figured it was a sure hit. There are 26 Alice stories about Alice McKinley growing up in Silver Spring and they are a rather substantial following. One of our 7th graders spent spring break reading all of these books, so it has been on my list for a while.

I laughed out loud as Alice got herself into one embarrassing scrape after another. I never expected Naylor to plumb the deeper emotions and loneliness that 6th grade girls explore or impart wisdom as Alice reflects on her experiences. It was a delightful, quick read.

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### **Heidi (Yup. Still here.) says**

What a great middle grade read. You know a middle grade book is above average when you can read it as an adult and still love it. I felt like I could really relate to Alice. My own mother died when I was 13 so I know what it is like to want to find a "replacement mother". I feel like Ms. Naylor did a wonderful job of showing how hard it is to be a tween and think all the crazy thoughts someone that age thinks. I am glad I stumbled upon this series ( I saw one of the later books when Alice is in high school at the library) and feel a little overwhelmed that I have so much catching up to do (1 down, 20 to go!), but so far I can't wait to spend more time with Alice.

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### **Kathryn says**

October 2011 re-read.

It's hard to believe I've been reading (and re-reading) Alice for 13 years. My Alice collection is mismatched from all the different print runs, so I broke down and bought the matching set with the new covers. I love them! The font and style has been synced for all of the volumes, and very small updates have been made (probably unnoticeable if you haven't read these books over a dozen times) such as "milkman" being changed to "mailman." But this is still the same Alice who debuted in 1986 and I met in 1998, with her same agonies and embarrassing moments. The illustrated covers give Alice a more timeless feel than the old photo-esque covers while still allowing her to look age-appropriate and contemporary.

If you haven't read any of these stories, you need to. Alice is every girl and has the most laugh-out-loud moments since Anastasia Krupnik (another timeless heroine who isn't touted nearly as much as she should be).

Long live Alice! I hope these never go out of print.

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### **Sophie Riggsby / allthingsequilateral says**

*\*Reviewed on Page Turners Blog for Banned Books Week on October 4, 2012\**

According to the American Library Association (ALA), Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's Alice series has been one of the most challenged year after year. I decided that this had to be the year to pick it up. I needed to see for myself why the story would be so very controversial.

And here's what I discovered – Alice is one of the most delightful narrators I've read. She's in sixth grade and in search of a mother figure because her own mom died when she was only five years old. Okay, you know that fact tugged at my mama heart-strings. But, the poignant moments which are brilliantly illustrated by Phyllis made me smile and cringe and nod my head in agreement. There's the moment her nineteen year old brother takes her shopping for jeans, there's the moment where she realizes the beautiful teacher next door to her classroom may not be as kind as Alice hoped she was and then there's the moment with her father where Alice learns that perhaps (even without a mother around) she just might make it through her

adolescence.

The book is funny and well written and I can hardly wait for my girls to read it. Now, I only read the first book in the series and I hope to read the rest as soon as time allows. What's controversial, well, the only thing I can think of is there is some bullying (like that doesn't happen in sixth grade) and clique exclusion (we all know that happens even in adult circles) and well, yes, Alice gets her first period (this is handled in a sweet and slightly embarrassing way). For me, none of those things merit a ban on the book. In fact, when my daughters finish reading the also banned *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*, I'm going to recommend they follow it up with *The Agony of Alice*. Both stories share very realistic narrators and ones that I admire. To my fellow parents, let's not fear these stories; instead, let's use them as an opening for a discussion with our tweens and teens.

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### **Natalie says**

I remember the first time I heard about Alice.

I was in 7th grade band and my fellow flutist was reading one of the Alice books. She was giggling her head off and so, of course, I had to know what was so funny. She started raving about this fabulous series and then in a confidential whisper told me that it talked about PERIODS and BOOBS. It was so SCANDALOUS! Which meant, of course, that I rushed right to the library and checked out all the Alice books I could find. Once I started reading them, I never stopped. Alice carried me clear through to college. I read them over and over and over again and I loved them each time.

Recently, I decided to revisit Alice. It's always interesting reading a childhood favorite through adult eyes. You wonder what will change. I have to say, I loved Alice just as much as I did when I was in junior high. She is so easy to relate to. All of her "agonies" are things that happen to all of us. (I love the boy in the blue underpants.)

As a teacher, it was fun to read about Mrs. Plotkin, and how she touched Alice's life. It made me want to be better.

A short summary: Alice is a 6th grader trying to figure things out. She's in a new town, in a new school and she didn't get the teacher she wanted. She lives with her dad and older brother who don't always know how to connect with her.

I think all girls should read these books. We all know what it's like to buy your first bra, get your period, and embarrass yourself in front of the class. It's sweetly funny watching Alice deal with all of these things.

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### **Brian says**

This book literally took me 40 minutes to read but it brought back a lot of memories. I first had to read this series in my 5th grade class. It was part of our reading group. I recently got a galley of the last book in this 24 book series and have decided to take it upon myself to re-read the old books that I haven't read in a good 15 years, and read some of the ones I didn't bother reading, culminating in the final book in the series. This

book was a great book, with a wonderful memorable character, some heartwarming moments, and some laugh out loud moments as well. Alice is a 6th grader who starts in a new school and is basically trying to grow up.

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### **Lindsey says**

Alice McKinley is sure she is the most embarrassing person on earth. She is also sure it's because she doesn't have a mother to show her what to do. Alice thinks if she can only get the beautiful Miss Cole as her teacher this year, she can adopt Miss Cole as her surrogate mother and get back on the right track. Alas, she is Mrs. Plotkin's room, and Alice is mortified. Everything bad always happens to her! Will Alice ever grow up? Or will she keep growing backwards?

I thought Alice was so spot-on as an adolescent girl. EVERY girl her age is convinced she is a mess. Her inability to control her frustration and her perception that she is always getting the short end of the stick so reminds me of me at that age. Naylor mixes plenty of funny situations too so the reader is not constantly feeling sorry for the trials and tribulations of Alice. I look forward to reading more of this series.

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### **Scribd says**

Behind this absolutely adorable cover lies an equally adorable story about an adolescent girl named Alice who is very anxious about growing up and going through the agony of sixth grade. If you're wondering how something so cute and endearing could end up on the American Library Association's most challenged books list consistently over the past two decades, it's probably because it talks about *periods* (no, not the "comma without the tail" kind) and *kissing*. While those are admittedly very big and real obstacles faced during pubescence that Phyllis Reynolds Naylor treats with utmost respect, there's more emphasis placed on the everyday embarrassments that afflict Alice as she searches for a female role model in the absence of her mother, who died when Alice was very young. There are the cringe-worthy types of embarrassments, like the moment where Alice disrupts a school play when she acts on her feelings of jealousy towards her sometimes-rival, sometimes-friend. There are also the quiet, happy embarrassments, like when Mrs. Plotkin, Alice's teacher, treats Alice with a special kindness even after Alice shows contempt towards Mrs. Plotkin in front of the class. Personally, I'm embarrassed that I never read *The Agony of Alice* when I was younger, but I look forward to delving further into the series even as an adult.

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### **Kari says**

I really enjoyed this book. Alice reminded me of myself at age 11. Embarrassing things always seemed to happen to me and I was always wanted to disappear. Alice lives with her father and older brother who have no clue how to relate to a girl. Her father calls her "Al" and her brother doesn't know that jeans come in girls sizes as well as boys. Her relationship with her family makes for some amusing scenes, such as the time a younger Alice asks her brother what a period is after hearing some older girls talking about theirs. He tell her it looks like a comma without the tail and goes at the end of a sentence. That had me cracking up.

Alice learns a lot about being yourself over the course of her sixth grade year. She also learns that the outer package may be beautiful, but the inside can be very ugly. Not everything that is good comes in a pretty

package. I think that any middle grade age girl would enjoy this one. Even though it was written in 1985, it is still relevant to today. They will be able to relate to the social awkwardness and pains of being a tween.

The Agony of Alice is the first in a series that follows Alice McKinley from middle school through high school. There are 3 "prequels", as well, that have Alice in elementary school. A visit to her website showed that Ms. Naylor is still writing Alice books and has 2 or 3 more planned. I like the idea of a series that a young girl can read as she moves from sixth grade through high school along with Alice. I know that the later books, when Alice is in high school, deal with more mature subjects. But, from what I can see by the synopses, they are subjects that a lot of high school kids deal with every day. I also found that the "Alice" series has been on the list for top 10 most challenged books in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Just that alone makes me want to read them all!

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### **Zoe D says**

The Agony of Alice is a fun book and Alice is a character that a lot of people can connect to. It's one of those books that when you start reading you can't stop.

Alice's mom died when she was younger and Alice is the women of the house; she live with her dad and her older brother Lester. She is going to start sixth grade soon with her friends, Pamela and Elizabeth. But she might have a problem without a female role model she can look up to she was hoping it might be her teach she just hopes she won't get Mrs. Plotkin either of the other two teachers would be better than her but she especially wants Mrs. Summers she would be perfect but she wonders what would ever happened to her if she got Mrs. Plotkin?

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