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Incantation



Synopsis

Estrella is a Marrano: During the time of the Spanish Inquisition, she is one of a community of Spanish Jews living double lives as Catholics. And she is living in a house of secrets, raised by a family who practices underground the ancient and mysterious way of wisdom known as kabbalah. When Estrella discovers her family's true identity--and her family's secrets are made public--she confronts a world she's never imagined, where new love burns and where friendship ends in flame and ash, where trust is all but vanquished and betrayal has tragic and bitter consequences. Infused with the rich context of history and faith, in her most profoundly moving work to date, Alice Hoffman's first historical novel is a transcendent journey of discovery and loss, rebirth and remembrance.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 7 Up—The opposing forces of love and hate, loyalty and betrayal underscore this brief but rich tale set during the Spanish Inquisition. Told by 16-year-old Estrella deMadrigal, the novel shows how gruesome beliefs nourished by ignorance and prejudice destroyed the lives of countless people. Hoffman weaves a tale of a close friendship between two teens, Estrella and Catalina. Both envision that their lives will be intertwined forever. However, there is a secret about Estrella and her family that unfolds in spurts. The deMadrigals are Jews who follow

their religion in secret, appearing to the world as good Catholics in order to escape persecution. Hoffman, a master storyteller, has captured this harsh time and the fragile lives of the hidden Jews. On one level this is the story of a friendship and the deadly interference of jealousy. It is also a story of the power of love and the resilience of the human spirit. Estrella develops incredible strength as she tries to save herself and her grandmother. Ultimately, it is the love of a Christian, Catalina's cousin Andres, that saves her. Hoffman's lyrical prose and astute characterization blend to create a riveting, horrific tale that unites despair with elements of hope. Good companion selections include Waldtraut Lewin's *Freedom beyond the Sea* (Delacorte, 2001) and Kathryn Lasky's *Blood Secret* (HarperCollins, 2004). --Renee Steinberg, formerly at Fieldstone Middle School, Montvale, NJ Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Growing up in Spain around 1500 in the village where her family has lived for 500 years, Estrella, 16, knows that there are secrets in her home. As books are burned in the streets, and Jews from the nearby ghetto are murdered, she confronts the reality that she is a Marrano, part of a community of underground Jews who attend a special "church." The plot tangent involving Estrella's best friend, Catalina, jealous because Estrella has taken her boyfriend, seems too purposeful, but the historical fact is compelling, with the reason for the secrets spelled out in the horrifying persecution: Estrella is witness to her mother's burning and her brother's bones being broken by the police "one at a time." Acclaimed adult writer Hoffman, whose YA books include *Aquamarine* (2001), makes the history immediate in Estrella's spare, intense first-person narrative, in which tension builds as Estrella's discovers her hidden identity. Suggest Deborah Siegel's *The Cross by Day, the Mezuzah by Night* (1999) or June Weltman's *Mystery of the Missing Candlestick* (2004) to readers wanting other stories about Marranos. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

This is a story of commitment to one's heritage and beliefs. A story of the ages which repeats itself again and again thru different times and in different places. The story of a People who have had to live in disguise in order to protect their very lives. Superstitions and avaricious greed hunted out the Jews of Western Europe in the times of the inquisition. This in places where even conversion to Christianity hundreds of years before couldn't save them. Respected families who were forever in service to their communities still were hunted out, robbed of their possessions, tortured and killed in horrific ways by the monsters of ignorance and cruelty. Incantation shows us what this unbelievable

reality looked and felt like. One sweet, hardworking, devoted family's story, each character so clearly shown to be an admirable and memorable person turned to ashes by an unhappy and thoughtless young neighbor girl. A lifetime of friendship becomes the condemning arrow shot out of jealousy over a cousin's kiss and a string of pearls. This story is a peek through the veils of history, at the same deeply rooted dark side of life - an evil that permeates our world still today. Alice Hoffman's beautifully crafted story is a reminder for us all that so much still remains to be undertaken in our world to enlist intelligence, compassion and the goodness of the human spirit to create and provide a world of cooperation and peace. Dr. Robin Bentel, Marin County, Ca.

Ok the problem I had was that I didn't totally realize it was YA when I bought it. The other problem I had was that I feel like Hoffman got bored about a third of the way into a writing REALLY interesting novel and so tied it all up, and ended the book, I was about 88% through when I realized I'd read it all in about 2 hours. I wanted to see a confrontation with Estrella and Catalina. I wanted to see her journey. I wanted, I wanted, I wanted, but none of it came to fruition. It was an really great first draft, the problem with that being, it wasn't a draft, it was the published work.

Incantation, Alice Hoffman, 166 pages. Four stars, young adult; three stars, adult. From the reviews, I gather that Ms. Hoffman was delving into the crossover market for young adult / adult literature. That partly explains Hoffman's return in this 2006 novel to a much earlier style of, say, *Turtle Moon*. A sample: "It was something small that made it happen. Small like the bite of a bug. That something was a kiss." The plot is as sparse as that prose, and that is not a complaint. Just to let you know that this is no *The Third Angel* or *Here on Earth* or *Practical Magic*. Coming of Age is the key to this novel, and betrayal is the lesson learned. Concerned with Spain during the Isabella and Philip period of booting out Jews and Muslims, the novel certainly isn't going to depict many joys. Its harshness, however, is glossed a good deal by its brevity. A fine novel for young adults and a good enough read for adults, especially fans of Hoffman's writing.

This is a story about a young girl who is part of a family of Conversos - Jews who had to live as Christians and practice their faith in hiding in Spain and Italy or suffer horrendous deaths. It is an up close and personal - living history of a time and place and what it was to be a Jew in Eastern Europe, witness pogroms, flee, live in hiding, loss. Finding a new home only to live in secret and in terror. The little girl doesn't know she is Jewish until late in the story. Over jealousy about a boy a

gentile girl turns on the family, tells lies as they have always been told about blood libel, witchcraft, etc. Dragged from their homes these Jews are tortured and burned alive while "neighbors" ransack their homes. Books are burned. It is beautifully crafted story - I was so disappointed, though, that it ended in less than 100 pages. After reading and witnessing such horror, I wanted to know what happened next. I wanted to know about the girl's journey carrying all this inside of her, along with the boy she loves. Going through all the horror I felt cheated - only because the writing is so exquisite and the characters so alive. I don't know if this is a story or a novella. I wanted more.

Loved the intertwining Kabbalah images with those of persecution. "Be yourself, save your soul ".
Excellent read. Read in a few unforgettable hours

I love Alice Hoffman. The first book of hers I ever read was Practical Magic, and I didn't like it - I didn't like magic then, or witches. I was a very down-to-earth reader. Since then I have explored other sides of myself and in turn have come to Alice Hoffman. Her use of language, her weaving of history through her books (unlike the modern-day Practical Magic), even her celebration of women, who by our nature have a special "knowing." I loved The Dove Keepers and The Red Garden. This one: absolutely beautiful and powerful writing, but how could end it so abruptly? I wanted so much more. So that is my disappointment. I loved the historical setting and how Hoffman brought the period to life and revealed secrets to me. I just wanted more.

Maybe I should have looked a little more closely, but this appears to be a "Young Adult" book. I've never cared for that categorization: adults, young and old, can read well-written sophisticated prose. This is simply too platitudinous, the voice so cliché, and I couldn't finish it, much less stomach more than five or six pages at a time. Her earlier book, The Museum of Extraordinary Things, is a marvelous and entrancing read, and I was hoping for something along those lines.

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