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ELLA ENCHANTED

BY GAIL CARSON LEVINE



Summary.....	2
About the Author.....	3
Book Review.....	4
Discussion Questions.....	6
Author Interview.....	8
Further Reading.....	11



SUMMARY

Ella is cursed with obedience at birth by a foolish fairy named Lucinda. When she is six years old, her mother dies. Before she dies, her mother orders her never to tell anyone about the curse. The only one who know is Mandy, a fairy who is the family cook and friend to Ella and her mother. At her mother's funeral, Ella meets Char, a prince who had admired her mother.

Ella's father is a merchant who doesn't see Ella much. He remarries Dame Olga and she brings her two daughters to live with them. Ella's father sees how clumsy she is, and orders her off to finishing school with Dame Olga's two mean daughters, Hattie and Olive.

Hattie is clever, and figures out that Ella must do whatever she is told. Ella wants to be free from the curse, and so she escapes finishing school once she hears of a giant's wedding which she thinks Lucinda will attend. She encounters elves and ogres on the way, and is saved by Prince Char.

When she arrives at the wedding, she tries to get Lucinda to take the curse back. Lucinda refuses, so Ella has to find her own way of lifting the curse before she loses someone she loves.

Courtesy: Phoenix Rye, Resident Scholar
<http://www.allscifi.com/topics/7549.asp>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gail Carson Levine grew up in New York City and has been writing all her life. Her first book for children, *ELLA ENCHANTED*, was a 1998 Newbery Honor Book. Levine's other books include *Dave At Night*, an ALA Notable Book and Best Book for Young Adults; *THE WISH*; *THE TWO PRINCESSES OF BAMARRE*; and her Princess Tales books: *THE PRINCESS TEST*, *THE FAIRY'S MISTAKE*, *PRINCESS SONORA AND THE LONG SLEEP*, *CINDERELLIS AND THE GLASS HILL*, *FOR BIDDLE'S SAKE* and *THE FAIRY'S RETURN*. She is also the author of the picture book *BETSY WHO CRIED WOLF*, illustrated by Scott Nash.

Gail, her husband, David, and their Airedale, Baxter, live in a two-hundred-year-old farmhouse in the Hudson River Valley.

In Her Own Words...

"I grew up in New York City. In elementary school I was a charter member of the Scribble Scrabble Club, and in high school my poems were published in an anthology of student poetry. I didn't want to be a writer. First I wanted to act and then I wanted to be a painter like my big sister. In college, I was a Philosophy major, and my prose style was very dry and dull! My interest in the theater led me to my first writing experience as an adult. My husband David wrote the music and lyrics and I wrote the book for a children's musical, *SPACENAPPED* that was produced by a neighborhood theater in Brooklyn.

"My painting brought me to writing for children in earnest. I took a class in writing and illustrating children's books and found that I was much more interested in the writing than in the illustrating.

"Most of my job life has had to do with welfare, first helping people find work and then as an administrator. The earlier experience was more direct and satisfying, and I enjoy thinking that a bunch of people somewhere are doing better today than they might have done if not for me."

http://www.bookbrowse.com/biographies/index.cfm?author_number=420



BOOK REVIEW

Imagine *Cinderella*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Hobbit* all spun together in a fantastical fairy tale for middle graders, and there you have *Ella Enchanted*. Ella is indeed an enchanting young girl. Alas, she has been enchanted by the fairy Lucinda's whimsical and thoughtless spell given to her at birth which makes her perfectly obedient. She must obey any direct command, which can lead her to danger, even death. Ella's story is about her quest to find Lucinda, the fairy that placed the spell on her and persuade her to lift the spell so Ella can lead a normal life. Well, as normal as a life can get when you live among gnomes, elves, ogres, giants, and centaurs all speaking different languages. Fortunately, Ella is good with languages, a talent that proves invaluable as she faces her many challenges.

All is well with Ella until her beloved Mother dies. She is distraught with grief comforted only by the cook, Mandy, (also a fairy) until she meets Prince Char at her mother's funeral. They become the best of friends, but then Ella's father decides to send her off to finishing school. There, Ella must contend with her future stepsisters, Hattie and Olive, one who accidentally discovers Ella's secret. Miserable, Ella escapes determined to find her father and Lucinda. Ella has discovered from the elves and gnomes she encounters on her journey that Lucinda and her father will be at the wedding of a giantess. Fortunately, after many misadventures, she finds Prince Char and his friends. Ella is determined to get to the wedding. When Ella arrives, Lucinda not only refuses to lift the spell, but Ella discovers that her father has lost all of his money. He must marry Dame Olga, mother of Harriet and Olive. Lucinda decides to flaunt her powers again by giving Ella's father and Dame Olga the gift of always being in love. Ella's father flees in horror, and Ella becomes the slave of her evil step sisters and Dame Olga. Prince Char must go to another country to complete his education, but Mandy saves the day by serving as the messenger between Char and Ella. As they continue their correspondence they fall in love, and Char asks Ella to marry him. She realizes that while she is still under Lucinda's curse, to marry him would put him in danger, too.

Meanwhile, Mandy and her fairy friends have decided to give Lucinda the comeuppance she deserves. After a time of having to be totally obedient as well as a squirrel, Lucinda swears off big magic and decides to help Ella. The rest of the story falls into place as the familiar tale of Cinderella complete with balls, carriage and glass slippers. The one twist is that Ella finally discovers only she can lift the curse of obedience. Char orders her to marry him but her love for

him is too great to allow herself to destroy him. Her willpower to say no and the excruciating pain it causes her breaks the curse at last.

Ella refuses to become a princess, though, and instead takes the title of Court Linguist. She travels with Char and learns every language. She loves her newfound power to say yes or no, and, of course, they live happily ever after.

Ella Enchanted is full of entertaining plot twists, excitement and Levine's masterful use of imaginary languages. It is fascinating to see the combination of so many fairy stories into a book that older kids will love. Ella is a delightful yet determined girl, realistic in a totally fantasy world. Her willpower and intelligence serve as a vital role model for young girls. Levine's imagination is almost without peer. She successfully interweaves journals, letters, first person and narrative into a book that is a definite page-turner. This book would make a great gift, and definitely is one that many girls would choose for themselves. Congratulations to Gail Carson Levine on her first children's book. It's a winner. Just ask the Newbery

Committee.--*Nancy Littlejohn*

<http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/oct98/child2.htm>



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Warning! Some of these questions contain key element plots.
Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

- Ella's father tries to set up a marriage for her with a man who is much older. How are marriages arranged in Frell? Do people marry for love or other reasons? How are marriage customs in Frell like and unlike modern marriage customs in our society?
- What kind of relationship does Ella have with her father? Do you feel he is wrong to try and marry her off to a wealthy man or to leave Ella alone with Dame Olga and her daughters? How is Ella's relationship with her father different from the relationship she had with her mother? Do you think Ella takes more after her mother or her father? Explain why.
- What is the difference between small and big magic? Give some examples of both. Why is Mandy so reluctant to cast big magic? Why does she rarely tell people that she is a fairy?
- What does it mean that Ella is in a line of women who are "Friends of Fairies" (page 25)? Are there instances in the story when Ella demonstrates her "fairy blood" and performs some magic of her own?
- While at finishing school Hattie orders that Ella discontinue her friendship with Areida, her only friend. After Hattie's command is issued, Ella proclaims, "In all the times I'd imagined the miseries she could inflict on me, I'd never imagined this. I'd thought of injuries, and I'd imagined terrible embarrassment, but I'd never thought of this kind of hurt" (page 81). How is the hurt she feels at ending her friendship with Areida similar to the conflict she feels at the prospect of marrying Char? How is this curse of obedience potentially dangerous to everyone she loves or befriends?
- Why do you think Ella is finally able to break her curse of obedience when she initially refuses to marry Char? What does Ella mean when upon breaking the curse she says, "In that moment I found a power beyond any I'd had before, a will and a determination I would never have needed if not for Lucinda, a fortitude I hadn't been able to find for a lesser cause. And I found my voice" (page 226)?

Do you think Lucinda finally learns the damaging effects of big magic by the end of the novel? Why or why not?

Lucinda's spells don't always work as she intends them. Ella's father does not transform into a loving person after he is cast into eternal love with Dame Olga and Ella finds ways to make mischief despite her obedience spell. What difference is there between choosing to do good and being forced into it?

How does Ella's knack for learning languages help her in social situations? What effect does she have when she speaks or attempts to speak to others in their native tongue?

Why does Ella attend the three balls that the king throws for Prince Charmont and risk getting caught by her stepfamily and by the prince himself?

http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm?book_number=540

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



When you started writing *ELLA ENCHANTED* did you imagine that it would one day become a movie?

No. I didn't think it would get published. Everything I'd written till then had been rejected. If it was published, I thought it might sell a few thousand copies and go out of print. I thought if I was lucky I could write more books and get them published, too. I still pinch myself over the way things have worked out.

As the author of the book, how involved were you in the production of the movie?

Not very. I had what are called consulting rights, which meant that the producer had to send me the script. I had the opportunity to comment, but the producer and director had no obligation to act on my comments.

The script is very different from the book, and so is the movie. My comments about plot weren't acted on. But my comments about obedience were. I said there had to be consistency in the way Ella responds to orders. She could follow commands figuratively or literally, but it needed to be the same throughout. In my book, Ella follows the meaning of commands. If she were told to hold her tongue she'd be silent. In the movie Anne Hathaway actually grabs her tongue and holds it. So it goes the other way in the movie, but it's consistent.

My husband and I were given the opportunity to go to Ireland to watch three days of shooting. We were just observers, although Miramax did have my very own director's chair ready for me! The filming was fascinating, and I'll never watch a movie in exactly the same way again. They only shoot the tiniest pieces at a time, only a few lines, which they film over and over until the director is satisfied. We were told that the director and producer were happy if they got a minute of usable film out of a whole day of shooting. And, since it was Ireland, the film crew had to stop frequently in the middle of a scene to wait for the weather to go back to what it had been at the beginning.

A mime was brought in to help. The idea was that Ella's body would process a command before her mind caught up. The mime helped Anne Hathaway reflect that idea in her movements. Isn't that interesting?

When did you first see the movie? Were there any changes to your characters? If so, how did the changes make you feel? Did they make you think about the story differently?

I've only seen the movie once, in November or December, I think, and not all the special effects were in place then. The movie is so different from the book that it's hard to compare them. There are new characters. For example, Char's parents are dead in the movie, and he has an evil uncle who has a talking snake as a sidekick.

The changes made me remember some of the choices I'd made when I wrote the book ten years ago. For example, I had thought of adding a political dimension. I'd thought of having Kyrrian policies toward the exotic creatures be inhumane. But ultimately I decided not to. Interestingly, the movie does just that.

What part of *ELLA ENCHANTED* was your favorite to write? Was this also your favorite portion of the movie?

I loved writing the letters Char and Ella exchange when Char is in Ayortha, but they're not in the movie at all! I loved writing Ella's flirtation with the Earl of Wolleck when Ella's under the influence of the torlin kerru, but that's not there either.

The movie is fun, and the book is fun. I wouldn't have wanted a somber interpretation, so I'm glad about that, and I love Anne Hathaway's performance. If I'd had the choice of anyone in the world to play Ella, I don't think I could have chosen better.

Do you have any suggestions for fans of *ELLA ENCHANTED* the book before they see *ELLA ENCHANTED* the movie?

To fans of the book, I'd suggest regarding the movie as a separate creative act. You might want to think about the choices the screen writers made and why they may have gone in the direction they did. But I hope you have the breadth and sense of humor to encompass both movie and book. For those who haven't read the book, I hope you'll start reading! And to everyone, don't be *too* obedient!

How did you get started as a writer

"I wrote as a kid, but I never wanted to be a writer particularly. I had been drawing and painting for years and loved that. And I meditate, and one time when I was meditating, I started thinking, "Gee Gail, you love stories-- you read all the time. How come you never tell yourself a story?" While I should have been saying my mantra to myself, I started telling myself a story. It turned out to be an art appreciation book for kids with reproductions of famous artworks and pencil drawings that I did. I tried to get it published and was rejected wholesale.

"That book led me to a class on writing and illustrating for kids, and when I went into it I thought that I would be more interested in illustrating. But I found that I was much more interested in writing and that I didn't like the illustrating at all. I had always been the hardest on myself when I drew and painted. I am not hard on myself when I write. I like what I write, so it is a much happier process.

"That's how I got started. And then everything I wrote was rejected for nine years."

What are the differences between writing fiction, fairy tale, and historical fiction.

"Contemporary fiction is the hardest for me because I am not really in the popular culture-- I don't watch TV. I had to go to an eighth grade class and follow them around, asking a lot of questions before I wrote **THE WISH**. I was never certain about getting it right. I was aiming for a timeless contemporary book. For example, I used the telephone in the book, and phone technology changes so much. All the music at their grad night is oldies, which is just as well because whatever is playing now is also going to be an oldie. In spite of myself, it will probably be dated."

"Making up one's own world is complicated. You have to keep track of it; you have to make sure that you are clueing the reader in. But working in the real world is very hard, for me anyways. For other people it's not."

"Historical fiction, in a way, is not as hard. It's all about research. I have a very vivid memory of the way my parents spoke and the 50's that I grew up in are closer to the 20's, I think, than today in many, many ways."

What advice do you give the aspiring young writers in the workshops that you lead?

"Save everything you write."

"I think kids abandon stories all the time. They start stories and get frustrated or get a different, better idea. I think that it is more worthwhile to stick with a story and revise it and try to finish it than abandon ship. Revisions, for any writer, are the name of the game."

"I want to write a book. In fact, that's kind of getting high on my list of things I want to do-- I want to write a writing book for kids."

What is your workshop like?

"Oh I love the kids. I love doing it. It's great. It's the best thing I do I think."

"These kids are getting kind of sophisticated. This summer they blew me away because they decided that they were going to bring enough copies of their work for everybody to take home, so that they could read each other's work over the next week. I couldn't believe it. They did this all on their own."

What do you enjoy most about being an author or going to the schools?

"I love it all. I love having written. Sometimes I love writing. I love to revise. Revising is my favorite part of writing. I love working with the kids."

http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=420



Further Reading

If you liked *Ella Enchanted* by
Gail Carson Levine
you might like the following books, too!

Cinder Edna by Ellen B. Jackson
A Telling of the Tales William J. Brooke
Cinderellis and the Glass Hill by Gail Carson Levine
The Fairy's Mistake by Gail Carson Levine
A Book of Princesses by Sally Gardner
The Princess Test by Gail Carson Levine
Princess Furball by Charlotte Huck
Untold Tales by William J. Brooke
Dragon's Breath by E. D. Baker
The Snow Princess by Ruth Sanderson
Once Upon a Curse by E. D. Baker
The Dragon Prince: a Chinese Beauty & the Beast Tale by
Laurence Yep
Gilly Martin the Fox by Mollie Hunter
The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen by Lloyd Alexander
If the Shoe Fits by Jane B. Mason
Cinder-Elly by Frances Minters
The Frog Princess by E. D. Baker
Let Down Your Hair by Jane B. Mason
Who's the Fairest? by Jane B. Mason
The Egyptian Cinderella by Shirley Climo
Moss Gown by William H. Hooks