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From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

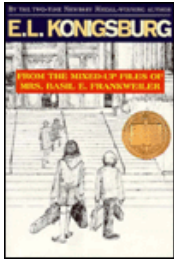
by E.L. Konigsburg

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Summary



Two children named Claudia and Jamie run away from home, because Claudia does not like it at home. She needs Jamie to go with her because of his money and his radio. So they run away to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. But, there is a mystery to solve. Who made Angel? Will they get caught living in the Met?

Most of all, will they solve the mystery of who made Angel?

Clarice

Chicago, IL

<http://fairy-tales.classic-literature.co.uk/book-store/0689711816/From-the-Mixed-Up-Files-of-Mrs-Basil-E-Frankweiler.html>



About the Author

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Elaine Lobl Konigsburg was born on February 10, 1930, in New York City. Her father, Adolph Lobl, a successful businessman, and her mother, Beulah Klein Lobl, provided their daughter a pleasant childhood. Konigsburg attended Carnegie Institute of Technology, now Carnegie-Mellon University, intending to become a chemist. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1952 and studied chemistry in graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh until 1954, when she married psychologist David Konigsburg. The two eventually settled in Jacksonville, Florida, where, after teaching science for two years in the public schools, Konigsburg settled down to raise her three children, Paul, Laurie, and Ross.

An uninspired scientist, Konigsburg found her true calling once her children had become more or less independent, and she turned to writing children's stories. Her books found a ready audience and received critical acclaim. **JENNIFER, HECATE, MACBETH, WILLIAM MCKINLEY, AND ME, ELIZABETH**, her first novel, was an honor book in the Book Week Children's Spring Book Festival and a Newbery Honor Book for 1968.

But the greater honor awaited **FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER**, which won the Newbery Medal in 1968 and a William Allen White Award in 1970. Konigsburg also earned an American Library Association Notable Book Award and a nomination for a National Book Award for **A PROUD TASTE FOR SCARLET AND MINIVER**.

It may seem strange that someone who started out to be a scientist should end up as a writer of books for young adults, but Konigsburg describes her transition as a kind of metamorphosis, with science as the caterpillar stage, childrearing as the chrysalis, and writing as the moth she was destined to become all along. Her remarkable sensitivity to young people's thoughts and feelings stems from close observation of her own children; and her books, which sometimes develop patently impossible situations, always have a ring of truth, for the characters are always real people with real motivations.

http://www.bookrags.com/shortguide-basil_e_frankweiler/utttheauthor.html



Book Review

Though it may read like a fantasy today, this perfect, kid-size adventure is pure delight. The author's attention to detail makes this adventure real and satisfying. How Claudia and Jamie make and execute their plans is a large part of the excitement. Konigsburg names everything they buy, from the twenty cents to dry their laundry to the seventeen-cent tip Jamie gives a cab driver. Their meals at the Automat are described as lovingly as the mysterious statue. In 1967, of course, everything cost less, the museum's geography was a bit different, and girls wore petticoats. Yet Konigsburg's craft makes the story timeless. She observes the characters as closely as their surroundings. Claudia's need to show off and Jamie's tendency to cheat at cards are as much an endearing part of them as their loyalty, humor, and ingenuity.

The quest for the sculptor's identity is bound inextricably with Claudia's own search for self. The mystery is complicated, but the irascible voice of Mrs. Frankweiler allows the author to clarify without ever seeming to lecture. An unusual choice for a children's-book narrator, eighty-two-year-old Mrs. Frankweiler makes a precise and witty storyteller. She even saves one delicious secret for the very end.

Konigsburg's second Newbery winner, **THE VIEW FROM SATURDAY**, will appeal to readers who like putting together the puzzle pieces of a story.

Reviewed By: Cindy Kane

<http://www.commonsemmedia.org/reviews/review.php?97&type=Book>



Discussion Questions

1. Read the letter from Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler on page 3. Discuss why you think the author started the book this way. This letter tells the reader that Mrs. Frankweiler had a personal mystery to solve and the solution led to her changing her last will and testament. Why is it important to write a will? If you were to write a will today who would you leave your most valuable possessions to and why?
2. Claudia had several reasons for running away. Does running away ever solve a problem? Discuss some different problem-solving strategies that Claudia could have used.
3. Claudia chose Jamie, her nine year-old brother, to be her companion in this adventure. Jamie had some personality traits that Claudia felt would be necessary to make her adventure a success. If you were planning a secret mission and needed a partner, what kind of person would you choose?
4. James had a good definition for homesickness. "Homesickness is like sucking your thumb. It's what happens when you're not very sure of yourself." How would you define homesickness? Discuss a time when you were homesick and how you felt.
5. Chapters two and three contain many examples of humor. Jamie or Claudia often say or do something to ease the tension of their situation. We often hear the phrase, "laughter is the best medicine". Discuss situations in the classroom, or on the playground, in which someone used humor to ease the tension.
6. Reread pages 105 and 106 (end of third paragraph). What would you have done if you had been James and your class had just visited the museum? Write a dialogue between Jamie, Claudia, Rube, Bruce and Sarah, if the hiding place had been discovered.
7. Suppose the children had gone home instead of to Farmington. What would have happened? What kind of ending would you have had for this novel? Would the problem of finding out about Angel be left unsolved? Can an author leave something unsolved or a problem unresolved? Why or why not?
8. Mrs. Frankweiler challenged Jamie and Claudia to find the file on the statue. The handicap was not to change the order of the files and to complete the task in one hour. Have you ever been faced with a challenge? If so, what was the handicap and how did you overcome it to meet your challenge.
9. When asked why she didn't sell the sketch, Mrs. Frankweiler said, "I need having the secret more than I need the money." What do you think she meant by this?
10. How do you think Claudia and Jamie's parents welcomed them home?



Author Interview

Have you always wanted to be a writer? When did you start writing?

No. I was the first one in my family to go away to college. I came from a small town where there was no guidance in the high school at all. It was a mill town, and I never knew anyone who made their living from the arts. When you did go away to college, you went away to be something -- an engineer, or a teacher, or a chemist. I never knew anyone who went away to be an artist until I was in college. When I was in college at Carnegie Mellon, I wanted to be a chemist. So I became one. I worked in a laboratory and went to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh. Then I taught science at a private girls school. I had three children and waited until all three were in school before I started writing. When my third child went away to school, I started to write in the mornings. I've already mentioned that I want to write something that reflects their growing up, because when I was growing up the books I read never reflected me.



What are your children's names? Have they ever served as character models for any of your books?

Their names are Paul, Laurie, and Ross. They have posed for the illustrations in my books. Laurie was Claudia and Ross was Jamie in *From the MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER*.

How do you feel about the problems children face today?

I believe that the problems that children face -- the children that I write about -- at the age I write about them are the same basic problems I had when I was that age. The essential problems remain the same, the dressing that goes on the problems changes. But the kids I write about are asking for the same things I wanted. They want two contradictory things. They want to be the same as everyone else, and they want to be different from everyone else. They want acceptance for both.

Where do you get your ideas from?

I get my ideas from things I've read, people I've met, situations I know about. The important thing about ideas is the coming together of character, place, theme, and plot. I'm going to suggest something. Suppose you take an ordinary event, and ask yourself "what if?" Suppose you get on the school bus tomorrow morning. What if suddenly the school-bus driver can only speak Hungarian and your best friend won't speak to you at all? Suppose you get up in the morning to see the sunrise, and what if the trees in the light of day are all blue instead of green and the sky is red instead of blue? Suppose you're sitting in school, and what if you are suddenly not right-handed but left-handed? What if you are suddenly blue-eyed instead of brown-eyed? Take an ordinary event, and ask yourself "what if?" When it all comes together, that's what getting an idea really is.

How important are characters to the story?

Characters are so important to a story that they actually decide where the story is going. When I write, I know my characters. I know how things are going to end and I know some important incidents along the way. I can give an example of this. When I was writing **FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF BASIL E. FRANKWEILER**, I did not know until Claudia was in Mrs. Frankweiler's house that she was going to take a bath in Mrs. Frankweiler's magnificent marble tub. It wasn't until I got her in that room that I knew what she was going to do. It's because at that point in the story, I knew the character Claudia as well as I know my own children.

Is the character of Mrs. Frankweiler based on yourself?

Actually, Mrs. Frankweiler was based on Miss Olga Pratt, who was headmistress of Bartram's School, the school where I taught. The woman who posed as Mrs. Frankweiler was a Miss Anita Brougham. And she lived in the same apartment house as we did, and one day in the elevator I asked if she would pose for me. And she did, and when that book won the Newbery, we had moved away from the apartment house. And a friend of mine who still lived there met Mrs. Brougham in the elevator and asked her how she felt to be famous. And she said, "I am very pleased for Mrs. Konigsburg."

Did you ever hear anything from Miss Pratt in regards to your book's winning the Newbery?

She had never been vain enough to check this sort of thing out! Miss Pratt was not wealthy, but she was a matter-of-fact person. Kind, but firm.

Do you enjoy writing your stories more than illustrating them?

Not necessarily. I began painting and drawing before I began writing. My first two children are very close in age, and I needed an outlet. I began taking painting lessons at adult education. When we moved to the suburbs of New York, I joined the Art Students League. I used to take art lessons on Saturday morning, and explore New York City in the afternoons. Many of the trips in the city were devoted to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

What kinds of books did you read when you were growing up?

I have to confess, I read a lot of trash. I read a lot of movie magazines. But I also read classics. One of the reasons I started writing is that I never felt I met children who were like me in the books I read. I would pick up a book and be promised that I would meet typical children in typical small towns, and the books always had children whose families had maids. And in my town, growing up, many of the mothers WERE maids. So I wanted to write about children like me. I went directly from reading children's books -- and I read a lot of trash -- and then I went to adult novels. I read a lot of popular fiction, authors who would mean nothing to you: **THE EGYPTIAN**, or **FOREVER AMBER**. And I also loved mysteries. The librarian in my town would only let me take one book at a time, and we were only allowed to keep them for two weeks! So I had to go back more often!

Do you ever go back and reread children's books you read as a child?

I am rereading **A LITTLE PRINCESS** right now, and when you find that children were sent away for four years and never saw their fathers, well, I thought that was ordinary growing up -- and that I was under-ordinary!

Who were your favorite authors growing up?

I have to tell you, I love Francis Hodgson Burnett and Louisa May Alcott, and I believe in their stories.

How would you describe your writing style?

I can't judge that. I didn't even know I had a style! E. B. White, in his book **ELEMENTS OF**

STYLE, says the thing to do is not affect a style. I didn't even know I had one until I wrote **FATHER'S ARCANE DAUGHTER**, and my editor said that this book was so different that she wished we could put it out under a pseudonym. But she said that my style was so distinct that people would recognize me! And until then, I had no idea I had a style! So it's really not for me to judge.

How do you go about revising your writing?

My editor -- I've had the same editor always -- sends me some suggestions. I have had two books go directly from manuscript to typescript, which is like getting an A+ on a paper. My editor makes suggestions, and I read them all and work with them. Neither she nor I approves of someone going in to tweak the story. We agree that you should read the comments over the whole story, and then decide what you are going to churn up. You don't change little bits at a time.

Do you ever want to change something you've written after it's been published?

I have to say yes and no. I don't reread my books. And I think that when I am called on occasion to look something over because someone wants to excerpt it or something, I reread it and I think that I would do it differently. Or I think I would be less verbose. But I don't hand something in unless I'm satisfied. I don't hand in half-finished work, or a vague notion. I don't hand it in unless I like it.

What are your hobbies?

I love to paint and draw. And we live on the beach, and I love to take long walks along the beach. If people ask me where my ideas come from, they very often come when I'm walking along the beach.

Did you ever think about becoming a writer when you were a child?

No, I was a very timid child. I thought about it, of course.

Do you have any advice for people who want to be writers?

I always give one word, and the word is: finish. The word is finish because I think the difference between being a person of talent and being a writer is the ability to apply the seat of your pants to the seat of your chair and finish. It means you'll sit there and work out the details, and work out the next transition, and that you'll have the discipline to transform talent into a written story, book, whatever.

Do you have any mixed-up files of your own?

Oh, yes. I don't have as many as Mrs. Frankweiler, but I do have mixed-up files. I'll tell you the names of some of the files. I have one called Fame and Celebrity. In addition to having files on research materials, I have one called bouboulina, which is a file about censorship. I have one called Reviews that Fault Something for Not Being Something Else. I have another one titled Notes on the third place, which was for my Newbery Medal acceptance.

Do you have any final words for the audience?

I want to thank you for your interest! And for your thoughtful questions.

<http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/authorstudies/authorhome.jhtml>



Further Reading

IF YOU ENJOYED READING **FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER** BY E.L. KONIGSBURG,
THEN YOU MIGHT LIKE THE FOLLOWING BOOKS, TOO!

DANCING WITH GREAT-AUNT CORNELIA: A NOVEL by Anne Quirk
UNDER THE MUMMY'S SPELL by Kate McMullan
THE RED-HOT RATTOONS by Elizabeth Winthrop
CHARLEY SKEDADDLE by Patricia Beatty
CHIP HAS MANY BROTHERS by Hans Baumann
THE ARTSY SMARTSY CLUB by Daniel Pinkwater
WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE MARRY MY SISTER? by Eth Clifford
CASSANDRA--LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL! by Nancy J. Hopper
MY DANIEL by Pam Conrad
YOSSI TRIES TO HELP GOD by Miriam Chaikin
NEW NEIGHBORS FOR NORA by Johanna Hurwitz
THE ROSE HORSE by Deborah Lee Rose
WHEN JESSIE CAME ACROSS THE SEA by Amy Hest
WINTER CAMP by Kirkpatrick Hill
IN GRANDPA'S HOUSE by Philip Sendak
CATHERINE CERTITUDE by Patrick Modiano
DAVE AT NIGHT by Gail Carson Levine
A BILLION FOR BORIS by Mary Rodgers
MAMA, I WANT TO SING by Vy Higginsen