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The Adoration of Jenna Fox

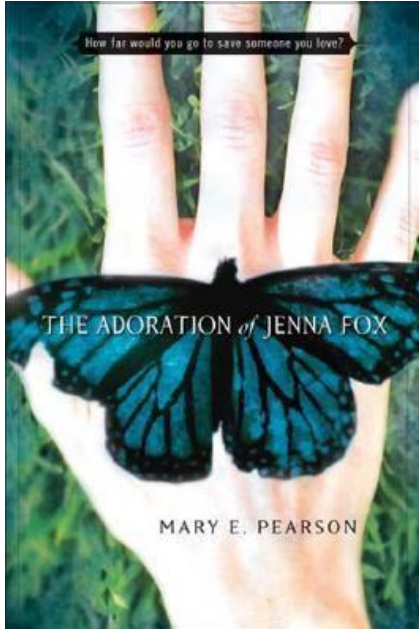
by Mary Pearson

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Summary



Jenna Fox has just woken up after being in a coma for a year, recovering from a terrible accident. Jenna can't remember what happened before the accident. She's been given home movies chronicling her entire life, but are the memories really hers? And why won't anyone in her family talk about the accident? Jenna is becoming more curious, but she is also afraid of what she might find out if she ever gets up the courage to ask her questions. What happened to Jenna Fox, and who is she really?

Identity. Where does it lie? In a face? A voice? A bundled string of events we call a lifetime? Is it in our DNA, bone, flesh, ancestry? How do we define our identity, and is it a once and for all definition? Or is it always changing?

Who am I? Can anyone ever know for sure just what it takes to be who we are?

We all search for our place in this world and how we fit in, but for Jenna Fox that search reaches dark new dimensions when she wakes from the coma and can't remember who she is. Worse, she doesn't remember the people who claim to be her parents. There is something curious about them, about the house they all live in--in fact, curious describes her whole life, as she attempts to unlock the secrets of who she was, and who she has become.

Source: Wake County Public Libraries catalog, www.wakegov.com/libraries

Source: http://www.marypearson.com/maryepearson_013.htm



About the Author



I suppose I have always been enamored with story and character. My mother tells me I could be the most annoying little kid, waking up each day as a new character. Every morning she would have to ask me "who" I was for that day, because unless properly addressed I refused to answer anyone.

One time when I was about four years old, my parents were out shopping at Sears. They each thought the other had me by the hand when in fact I was exploring my own aisle (translation: I was lost!) Two salesladies found me and sat me on the counter, asking me my name so they could page my parents. I

remember their consternation when I would only answer "Little Red Riding Hood." They couldn't shake my real name out of me no how, no way. I knew the value of persistence even then. My parents say they nearly fell over, when over the loud speaker they heard, "Would the parents of Little Red Riding Hood please come claim their child?" They knew exactly "who" was lost. These days I mostly wake up as myself, though I do seem to hang out with a lot of "characters" during the day.

Usually when people mention their education in their bios they only mention their college degrees, but to me, it is just as important what happened way before that. Wow--second grade! I will never forget Mrs. Alsenz. Boy, could she tell a great story! She would make them up and pretty soon have a classroom of wiggly kids exuberantly telling stories right along with her. And then there was Mrs. Bonsey in fourth grade. She always praised my writing and made a shy little girl feel like she might actually excel at something. And finally in twelfth grade came Mr. Kirk, crusty on the outside with a heart of gold on the inside, who loved the English language and taught his students to do the same. (Hey, Mr. Kirk, do you see me waving at ya?)

Later I went on to get a BFA from Long Beach State University in art. I worked for a time as an artist then started the most challenging job of my life--motherhood. Holy smokes, no one told me there would be no coffee breaks. But it is the most rewarding job I have ever had (watch out--I'll start dragging out the pictures).

Still later, I went to San Diego State University where I received my teaching credential. I went on to teach many different grades but it was my second grade students who pushed me back into writing. During Writing Workshop I would sit with them and write, loving the process, loving the stories, and lo and behold deciding I would love to return to my first love. That's a whole lot of lovin' going on and luckily for me I was able to do just that. Not that writing is easy. I have a huge stack of rejections to prove it, but I still have enough of that Little Red Riding Hood persistence in me to keep on going.

Now I write full time from my home in San Diego. My books to date are *The Miles Between*, *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, *A Room on Lorelei Street*, *Scribbler of Dreams*, and *David v. God*. More are definitely on the way.

Source: http://www.marypearson.com/maryepearson_006.htm



Book Review

Seventeen-year-old Jenna Fox awakens after more than a year in a coma to find herself in a life--and a body--that she doesn't quite recognize. Her parents tell her that she's been in an accident, but much of her past identity and current situation remain a mystery to her: Why has her family abruptly moved from Boston to California, leaving all of her personal belongings behind? Why does her grandmother react to her with such antipathy? Why have her parents instructed her to make sure not to tell anyone about the circumstances of their move? And why can Jenna recite whole passages of Thoreau's *Walden*, but remember next to nothing of her own past? As she watches family videos of her childhood, strange memories begin to surface, and she slowly realizes that a terrible secret is being kept from her. Pearson has constructed a gripping, believable vision of a future dystopia. She explores issues surrounding scientific ethics, the power of science, and the nature of the soul with grace, poetry, and an apt sense of drama and suspense. Some of the supporting characters are a bit underdeveloped, but Jenna herself is complex, interesting, and very real. This is a beautiful blend of science fiction, medical thriller, and teen-relationship novel that melds into a seamless whole that will please fans of all three genres.

Reviewer -- Meredith Robbins, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School, New York City

Source: **School Library Journal**, May 2008 v54 i5 p136(1)



Discussion Questions

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

1. When you meet Jenna Fox and her family, in what time period do you think the book is set? What clues lead to your conclusion?
2. Jenna says "It's too much work trying to become who I am, always having to ask others what I should already know." Do you think she would rather just give up and return to her coma? Why do you think it's "too much work"?
3. Why does Jenna share so much about herself with her classmates at the Ecosystem Charter School?
4. Discuss how you think Jenna reacts to the "adoration" mentioned in the title *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*.
5. When Jenna finds out about "the accident" and what happened to her, what is your reaction? After reading her father's description of what was done, would you want to be Jenna? Why or why not?
6. Throughout the book, whenever Jenna is told to go to her room, she complies. Why is it significant that when Jenna and her mother have an argument and Jenna is told to go to her room, she doesn't?
7. Careful is a word that Jenna thinks of a lot and uses to describe various actions. Describe ways that Jenna is or isn't careful.
8. Jenna wonders and worries and asks "Are there some things I will never know?" Do you ever ask yourself the same thing? What would you rather not know? Is it important that you not know everything?
9. When does Jenna begin to feel comfortable with who she is? What signs tell you that she's beginning to accept who she is?
10. Which is the whole Jenna — the one before the disaster or the one after the disaster? Explain your thoughts.
11. Do you believe that Jenna Fox is "living"? What percentage of the brain needs to be present in order for it to be considered "living"? Are people "living" if they can think and reason or do they need to have feelings and emotions?
12. At what point do you think that scientists are using technology to play God? Who should be able to make the decisions to develop and use this technology? The government? The scientists? Individuals?
13. Do you think that this type of technology solves the sadness of losing a child? Is the same child being created? Should the child have any say in the decision if possible?

14. The book brings up the topic of the use of antibiotics. Do you believe that humans have caused bacteria and viruses to become stronger by overusing antibiotics? What do you think will be the consequences of these actions?
15. Do you think that parents can adore their children too much? If so, what could be the outcomes of this adoration?
16. Do you think that any type of body reconstruction should be allowed? If so, how much and to what extent? Should there be limits to the amount of a body that should be rebuilt as there was in the book?
17. Do you think that just because something is possible in science that we should do it? What should be used to determine what should and should not be permitted?
18. Stem cell research is being conducted to try to cure spinal cord injuries and diseases such as Alzheimer's. Stem cell research is controversial because of the source of the cells. If the cells come from adults, there is less concern, but if the cells come from unborn embryos, there is a lot of opposition. Do you think all types of stem cell research should be allowed? Explain your reasoning.
19. The technology used in the book would allow Jenna Fox to live anywhere from two years up to 200 years. If possible, would you want to live up to 200 years? Why or why not? What could be some of the impacts on the environment if people start living longer?
20. In science there is a law that states that you can never do just one thing to the environment. What do you think this means? How do you think the technology used in this book would change the earth?
21. Jenna's mother gives her videos of her past life so she can remember who she is, what she likes to do, who her relatives and friends are, and so on. What discrepancies does she notice between who she is now and what the videos portray?
22. Some of the pages in the book are gray in color, rather than the standard white of most books. Why do you think these pages were included? What's the significance of the page color? The message?
23. Why does Lily suggest to Jenna that she watch the video discs out of order and begin with the last one? When she watches the last one, what does she learn?
24. What does Jenna do in her spare time? How does that compare with your life?
25. When Jenna walks into the secret, locked room and sees the 6-inch square computer with her name on it, what is your first thought?
26. If you were in Jenna's position, would you tell others what happened to you? If so, who would you tell? Do you think they'd keep it secret?
27. The process that is used to save Jenna Fox is fictional. Do you believe that, if this process ever becomes available, humans should be able to make the decision to use this technology? Should there be any regulations on who can use it and when? Who should make these regulations and enforce them?
28. If you were in a car accident such as Jenna Fox, would you want someone to make the decision for you to be recreated? Why or why not?
29. Do you agree with Jenna's decision to get rid of the boxes that contain her two friends? Do you consider them living? Should they be given a chance to survive?



Author Interview

What inspired you to write *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*?

The first seeds of the story were planted when my teenage daughter was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Of course at first I was terrified, but very soon I realized how lucky we were that we lived where we did and when we did because there was a good treatment. Just fifty years earlier she would have died of this disease and now, thanks to good doctors and good treatments she would survive. It made me wonder just how far medicine would advance in another fifty years. And then as she went treated and I saw far sicker children in the hospital and the agony their parents were going through, I wondered again, how far would a parent go to save their child? How much would they be willing to put them through? As a parent, how far would I go?

Of course, these were only 'wonderings' of mine at the time during all the long hours and months waiting in hospital rooms while my own child went through treatment. I didn't know these would be questions that would one day be the impetus for a story. Six years later when I was about three quarters done with this book, another seed was planted. My second daughter became seriously ill. This second diagnosis was almost my undoing, but I believe that it deepened the story, my understanding of the characters, and also deepened my resolve that you never know what you might do in an impossible situation.

If *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* were to be made into a movie, and you were the casting director, who would you pick to play your main characters?

It is going to be made into a movie! We've had interest for months and it recently sold to 20th Century Fox. An awesome producer, Julia Pistor, and director, Brad Silberling, are making it. I met with them and they had so many wonderful ideas about how to turn the book into a movie, which I knew immediately that they would make an awesome one. I can't wait to see who they cast. I told them who a few of my "dream" choices would be, but I know they will choose the best possible actors because this is what they do.

Why do you write for young adults? What do you really enjoy or find challenging about writing for this particular audience?

For me, this age is such a fascinating, exciting, and pivotal time. I really don't think of the teen years as a stage, as many people do, but the beginning of this long stage we call adulthood that is always in a state of change. You don't finish the teen years and suddenly become this static adult. You continue to evolve. I am not the same person I was ten years ago, or even five years ago. But what I like about the teen years is that as we establish out identities apart from our parents, deciding what we believe, from politics, to religion, to relationships and how they should be approached, we are feeling our way, making good and bad decisions for the very first time. I think this heightens the drama, but more importantly for me, as a writer I can have patience with such characters, as opposed to adults who are repeating the same mistakes over and over again.

Have you ever, do you plan to, or would you like to write for a different audience in the future?

Sure! If the right character or situation spoke to me, I probably would have no choice.

What are you writing now?

I am working on another YA, this one about chance and coincidence and a girl who has had more than her fair share of it in her life. I am very near the end. It should be out in spring of 2009.

I know it's probably like being asked to choose a favorite child, but do you have a favorite of your books?

Always the newest one out because it is so fresh in my mind.

Can you share a little about your road to publication?

I began writing while on breaks from my teaching job and eventually started writing full time around ten years ago. I joined the SCBWI, bought the *Children's Writers and Illustrators Digest* and began submitting my first finished manuscript. That one never sold—it was a long rambling historical—but I did get some good feedback from editors saying they liked it but they wished it moved along a little faster. That was an understatement. I had no clue about pacing at that time, so when I started my second manuscript I was committed to make every word count. That was a great learning experience for me, and that manuscript, *David v. God*, did indeed sell. Once I understood pacing I tried to slow down and flesh my stories out a little more. Every book is a new challenge. I try to learn something from each one I write, so that I am always growing as a writer.

What is one of your favorite lines or passages from *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*?

Since it is near the end of the story and might be a spoiler I won't quote it, but there is a paragraph about winter in Boston that tugs at my heart every time I read it. It includes an age old saying that I know will be relevant a hundred years from now because some things never do change. I cried when I wrote that passage and I don't often cry as I write.

What three things are always on your desk?

1. Paper. Piles of paper. And lots of scraps where I have jotted down a thought on whatever piece of writeable material is available, like napkins, dry cleaning tickets, or store receipts while I am out and about. By the time I am finished with a book I have a drawer full of them.
2. Chapstick.
3. Coffee rings.

Thanks for doing this!

<http://teenbookreview.wordpress.com/2008/03/05/interview-mary-e-pearson/>



Further Reading

If you liked *THE ADORATION OF JENNA FOX* by Mary E. Pearson you might like to read the following books, too!

CHERRY HEAVEN by L.J. Adlington

THE DIARY OF PELLY D by L.J. Adlington

FEED by M.T. Anderson

SPACER AND RAT by Margaret Bechard

THE SECOND LIFE OF LINUS HOPPE by Anne-Laure Bondoux

LITTLE BROTHER by Cory Doctorow

THE GOODNESS GENE by Sonia Levitin

TOMORROW, WHEN THE WAR BEGAN by John Marsden

SHADE'S CHILDREN by Garth Nix

THE MILES BETWEEN by Mary E. Pearson

UNWIND by Neal Shusterman

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LARRY by Janet Tashjian

Uglies by Scott Westerfeld