

Ella Minnow Pea – Book Review

Ella Minnow Pea is a story that follows a girl who lives on the island of Nollop off the coast of South Carolina, which was named after the author of the well-known pangram, 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.'

Ella's happy and simple life begins to change as the island's council adopts totalitarian views, enforcing alarming regulations and restrictions. One such law involves banning the use of certain letters of the alphabet, and as each letter disappears from the characters' vocabulary, it disappears from the novel.

Ella attempts to save her loved ones and the island's citizens from the tyranny they face, and fights for their safety and right to self-expression and freedom.

The concept of this book is great; as a word lover I could see it being the perfect little story. The idea that certain letters of the alphabet are banned from use seems such an interesting one to explore, as are the effects of totalitarianism on a previously quiet and happy society.

The story is written in epistolary form; letters are exchanged between characters as the sole form of narration. This was the initial reason behind me picking this book up because I was writing an assignment and wanted to refresh myself on the technique as I haven't read that style for a long time. The form worked for this book because the reader is able to see the letters disappear, which would not have been doable or as effective in, for example, third person narration. It also kept me reading because the letters are short and I was turning the page to the next letter before I knew it. It did become a bit tedious by the end though and some of the info dumps between certain characters were very obvious and stilted. That being said, it was a good choice of narration.

As the leaders in the community force the citizens to drop more and more letters from their vocabulary, it became increasingly difficult to read the book. The lack of letters also means the author has had to use words that make the writing seem a little unnatural at times, but that is to be expected as the choice of words becomes more and more limited. Obviously, these two factors demonstrate the difficulties the characters are facing.

This story is an example of how quickly a government can change and is a gentle contemplation of events such as the Nazis' rule. The punishments seemed unbelievable to me and the community was strangely and too quickly submissive so it didn't completely convince me, but again, this does make the reader consider certain events in history. With the book being classed as Young Adult, which I didn't realise until I started, these are important topics to explore.

I did find this book interesting but unfortunately it did not quite live up to my expectations. However, I do recommend it for when you're looking for a quick read and something different and a bit quirky; I know a lot of people have enjoyed this one!

I gave it 3/5 stars.