



In Sight of Stars

Gae Polisner

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Seventeen-year-old Klee's father was the center of his life. He introduced Klee to the great museums of New York City and the important artists on their walls, he told him stories made of myths and magic. Until his death.

Now, forced to live in the suburbs with his mom, Klee can't help but feel he's lost all the identifying parts of himself—his beloved father, weekly trips to the MoMA, and the thrumming energy of New York City. That is until he meets wild and free Sarah in art class, with her quick smiles and jokes about his “brooding.” Suddenly it seems as if she's the only thing that makes him happy. But when an act of betrayal sends him reeling, Klee lands in what is biting referred to as the “Ape Can,” a psychiatric hospital for teens in Northhollow.

While there, he undergoes intensive therapy and goes back over the pieces of his life to find out what was real, what wasn't, and whether he can stand on his own feet again. Told in alternating timelines, leading up to the event that gets him committed and working towards getting back out, Gae Polisner's *In Sight of Stars* is a gorgeous novel told in minimalist strokes to maximal effect, about what makes us fall apart and how we can put ourselves back together again.

In Sight of Stars Details

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Author : Gae Polisner

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From Reader Review In Sight of Stars for online ebook

Flor says

I received a copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange of and honest review.

More like 3.5 stars.

It was good but that's it, a quick read that help me get through a reading slump, so thank you book.

This is the story of Klee, a boy who has to start over after a suicide attempt (this is not a spoiler as it happens in the first chapter), he gets into a mental facility and then we'll switch from his healing to his memories.

There are very important people in his life, his mom, his girlfriend and his dad, the latter being the most mentioned due to their closeness and the fact that he killed himself.

I honestly find those flashbacks to be a little confusing, but once I got used to, I found myself waiting for them to appear.

Towards the ending comes a revelation that it did not expect and would have liked to explore a little bit more.

Overall a quick read that deals with heavy topics and a little mix of art and New York City. It was fine.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘There was a time when I felt happy and normal.’

Klee Alden is seventeen years old when the world he was comfortable in changes forever. His father, the centre of his universe, dies. He has committed suicide, and it is Klee who finds him. Klee (pronounced Clay) has explored New York City's museums and art galleries with his father, learned about the lives and loves of great artists, experienced the magic his father could generate.

We meet Klee in a psychiatric hospital for teenagers. And, as we find out why Klee is in hospital, we learn about how his life changed after his father's death and why Sarah, a girl he met in art class, has become so important to him.

I was deeply moved by this story. There are two main reasons for this. First, I had some experience myself as a teenager in a psychiatric institution and although that experience is over forty years ago, I remember trying (and failing for a long time) to make sense of what was happening. The world had shifted, and my place in it ceased to exist. Secondly, and more importantly, Ms Polisner takes Klee through the journey he needs to make in a way which felt so real (at least to me). Relearning how (and who) to trust, adjusting to medication, realizing that there is usually more than one reality (and certainly more than one view of it). Klee's struggles are never trivialised, his views are not discounted. But he learns (as we all do if we survive the journey into adulthood) that our knowledge is often incomplete, our interpretations sometimes flawed.

Klee's journey involves a number of different characters. We see each of them through Klee's eyes, so our images are sometimes incomplete. I finished the novel hopeful that Klee would find a new 'happy and

normal'. I finished the novel knowing that I would be rereading it again at some stage. Why? Because there are several layers to Klee's story, and I know that I've not yet absorbed them all.

This is Ms Polisner's fourth published novel. I've enjoyed each of the three novels I've read ('The Summer of Letting Go' is still on my reading list). Ms Polisner has a gift for creating believable characters in challenging situations, the kind of fiction many young adults can relate to.

Note: My thanks to NetGalley and St Martin's Press for providing me with a free electronic copy of this book for review purposes.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Dawn McNutt says

I received an uncorrected proof from Facebook friend and author, Gae Polisner. This review, however, is written without bias and without a complete summary because...read the book. I hate spoilers. Without giving up the plot I can say it is beautifully written with characters that are still in my mind and even made me dream of them as I napped today. The nap was necessary because I couldn't put the book down last night and stayed up until I finished it this morning after 3 AM. The subject matter, concerning mental health and recovery, complicated parental relationships and friendships was so real and handled with great care. There were a couple of gut punch parts but overall It gave me hope. It was deep enough to challenge adult and young readers alike. Definitely giving this book as a gift to others. I also think that this book could help people struggling with anxiety and depression even though the story does not necessarily focus on those diseases but rather tells a beautiful story of one teens journey. I love the characters and it's a really good book. The small stories within and the riddle were a nice touch. I liked the alternating perspectives used in the writing. A must read, for sure. I wonder how long these characters will be hanging out with me, making me think? Probably a really long time.

Jeff Zentner says

I loved this book from start to finish.

It's an achingly fierce exploration of the way the world wounds us and heals us. If you love exquisitely written coming-of-age stories that will leave you breathless, *In Sight of Stars* is for you. I wanted to underline every other passage.

Michele Knott says

Brilliantly crafted.

So many lines I want to return to and think about. This is a book that is worthy of many rereads.

Larry H says

4.5 stars, rounded up.

Klee (pronounced "Clay") worshiped his father. They shared a love for art and artists, especially van Gogh, and they spent countless hours together painting and visiting museums and galleries, and Klee loved listening to his father's stories, even the ones which were so clearly made up. He knew his father gave up his dreams of becoming an artist to have a stable job as a lawyer, but his father wants him to have the chances he never had.

His father's sudden death turns Klee's life utterly upside down. He's forced to leave New York City, leave his best friends behind, and move to a house in the suburbs with his mother, whom he thinks of as "The Ice Queen." He doesn't think she's sad enough about his father dying, and he blames her for everything that has gone wrong. But he just needs to bide his time a little bit longer before he can go to art school in Boston, fulfilling his father's wishes.

Klee feels angry and abandoned, and isn't dealing well with his grief. But then he meets Sarah, a free-spirited girl in his art class at his new school, and he is drawn to her immediately. She simultaneously draws him in and keeps him at arm's length, but she recognizes Klee's talent and his generous heart (as well as his abs). He starts to think that perhaps Sarah can save him from his crushing grief, but she has her own troubles, and doesn't like it when he broods.

"I follow silently, wondering what it is about her that breaks my heart and fills it at the same time, that scares me but comforts me, that makes me want to tell her things I can't begin to find words for."

One night, feeling that Sarah is pulling away from him and suddenly being confronted with what he believes is the truth about his parents' marriage, things go utterly, utterly wrong. In a moment of abject despair, Klee's actions land him in what is known as the "Ape Can," a psychiatric hospital for teenagers.

As Klee begins to deal with the feelings that sent him spiraling downward, he must begin to confront the truth—about his father, his mother, his parents' relationship, and his relationship with Sarah, and he needs to figure out what is real and what he has imagined, or dreamed into existence. With the help of an understanding therapist, a unique hospital volunteer, and a few of his fellow patients, he starts to realize that he can pick up the pieces and live his life doing what he loves—art.

In Sight of Stars (taken from the van Gogh quote, "For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream") is told in two perspectives—present time and Klee's life after his father's death—in order to get a full picture of the challenges he has faced, and you get to uncover the truth at the same time he does. It is gorgeously told, and you feel the emotions, the struggles, the epiphanies that Klee does.

Gae Polisner, whose last book, ***The Memory of Things*** (see my review), made my list of the best books I read in 2016, writes with such beauty, such empathy, such heart. I loved these characters, and wouldn't have minded if the book were twice as long.

I struggled a bit with the start of the book, because in an effort to help you see things from Klee's traumatized and drugged perspective, the narration was a little jumbled and I wasn't sure what was real and what were his hallucinations. But that ended quickly, and I found myself utterly hooked on this story, needing to figure out

what had happened. Polisner made me cry, she made me laugh, and she made me think. There were so many times I just marveled at her turn of phrase, or a piece of imagery.

In Sight of Stars might not necessarily break new ground, but it touched my heart and my mind. This is a book that says you can't go it alone, that we need to come to terms with the flaws of those around us as well as our own flaws, admit what is hurting or bothering us, and that is how we can find the strength to move on. I hope those who need to hear that message get their hands on this book.

NetGalley and St. Martin's Press provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com, or check out my list of the best books I read in 2017 at <https://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com/2018/01/the-best-books-i-read-in-2017.html>.

Donalyn says

I've read all of Gae Polisner's books and enjoyed them all, but this is her best so far. Her characters feel like people you know (or want to know) and the structure of this book is unique and thoughtful. I can't wait to share this book in my workshops this year!

Kelly Hager says

Finished *In Sight of Stars* by Gae Polisner. I received a copy for review. This will be published March 13.

Klee (pronounced like clay) has been committed. We don't know why, and this book goes back and forth in time, explaining how he got there and, more importantly, how he'll find his way back.

I want to make my book club read this, because I have so many thoughts. I think teens will love this---this book really showcases the way that everything feels so viscerally important but never makes it feel silly or trivial, but I think it will also resonate with adults, because we actually really get the idea of having to decide whether to pursue your passion or to settle for a career you don't love so you can manage to buy food and pay rent and all the other delights of adulthood.

I'm not sure I can even express just how deeply this book has resonated with me. Every character, every theme, every nuance is absolutely perfect. Most of all, it's about how art can save us temporarily while we become strong enough to save ourselves. And about how asking for help is not at all weak. The world is better with this book in it.

Highly recommended.

Vishy says

Gae Polisner's *'In Sight of Stars'* was one of my most awaited books this year. I loved all her three earlier books and so I couldn't wait to read her new one.

In the first scene of the story we find Klee Alden, our narrator, opening a door and entering somewhere and he sees something inside which shocks him and something inside him snaps and he takes a knife out of his pocket and before anyone around him could do anything, he tries to cut himself in his neck. Sometime later we find him in a hospital and he hears voices while his eyes are closed. Later, when his physical health is better, he meets the therapist, Dr Alvarez. As Klee and Dr Alvarez talk about his past and what led to his present, Klee also narrates his story in the first person in the gaps between two therapy sessions, and we get to know more about his life, his dad who was a lawyer but who was a painter at heart, his mom who is always dressed elegantly and who seems to be always detached emotionally from family happenings, his friends Kleto and Dan, his new friend and later girlfriend Sarah - we learn about all these people and the part they play in Klee's life. We also learn about the people he meets at therapeutic centre - Martin, Sabrina and Gene - people who are there for therapy like him and with whom he becomes friends. At least sort of. We also learn about Sister Agnes Teresa who frequently visits Klee in the evening, plays board games with him and keeps him engaged and provides him opportunities to learn and grow as a person. We also learn about Nurse Carole, who takes care of Klee. We also learn about Klee's love for the paintings of Van Gogh, a love which has been passed on to Klee by his dad. As we wonder what happened in Klee's life that led to his present situation, the different story strands weave together into one fabric and the surprises are revealed. When the revelations arrive, they are stunning - I didn't see them coming.

The first thing I loved about 'In Sight of Stars' was the cover. It is stunning, isn't it? A great ode to Vincent Van Gogh. I also loved the story - the shocking start, the journey back and forth across time as the different happenings in Klee's life are revealed, the stunning surprise which leaps at us towards the end and how all the story strands come together perfectly in the end. Halfway through the novel, I despaired for Klee - it looked clearly that he has suffered a lot, but we don't know the details, and I wanted things to become better for him so that he could live a normal boring life, like everyone else. Does he get to do that? I so want to answer that question but I won't - that is not for me to reveal but for you to read and find out. I loved most of the characters in the story - some of them were beautiful and perfect while others were beautiful and complex and flawed. I loved both types. My favourites were Dr Alvarez and Sister Agnes Teresa and also Klee's mom, but when I think about it again, I really loved them all - they were beautifully sculpted. Gae Polisner's prose flows beautifully and every sentence and paragraph and page moves the story, builds a character or sets up a scene. There is no word wasted. The book is also a love letter to Vincent Van Gogh and his paintings. If you love Vincent Van Gogh, this book is definitely for you.

It is hard for me to not compare 'In Sight of Stars' with Gae Polisner's other books. I love them all because of the way they take a contemporary issue involving teenagers, family, community and society and explore it in depth in the form of fiction. 'The Pull of Gravity' will always have a special place in my heart because it was Polisner's first book but I also loved 'The Summer of Letting Go' and 'The Memory of Things'. In this book, 'In Sight of Stars', I felt that the style and the story and the characters were more intense, more grown up. I felt that the author was getting into new terrain here. I loved that. I think, though it is hard to compare, that it is one of Gae Polisner's finest works.

'In Sight of Stars' is about love, family, loss, grief and about the beauty and therapeutic power of art. It is early days yet, but I think it is one of my favourite books of the year.

I will leave you with some of my favourite passages from the book.

"My body plummets, strong like a bullet, and then I hit the water, hard, stinging, losing my grip on Sarah's hand. I plunge deeper, and deeper, and deeper."

Everything erases from my brain. The pressure is intense on my ears.

No sound.

No thoughts.

No nothing.

Then, pushback. And lightness. From dark green to pale green to blue, a brilliant and stunning restoration of light as I ascend. I surface, above the water, bobbing like a cork. The sun hits my face and my breath relaxes, and my ears fill with the sound of Sarah laughing."

"Was there magic?"

She laughs. "Well, maybe 'magic' is too strong a word. Funny, though," she says, "how we only recognize huge, seismic breakthroughs when, really, all progress is good progress no matter how small. Sometimes we need to be willing to measure it in millimeters, not feet."

"So, as long as we're already here at rock bottom," Dr. Alvarez says softly, "digging at the painful stuff, let's just do it, shall we? Let's deal with the big purple elephant in the room. Let's go the rest of the way. That's what I'm paid for, right? I might as well earn my keep."

"We can only make ourselves happy. We can't save others. We can love others. But we can only save ourselves."

Have you read Gae Polisner's 'In Sight of Stars'? What do you think about it?

Aimee ♥ | Aimee, Always says

Whoops, I ended up not finishing this one. **The choppy writing, manic pixie dream girl trope, and confusing AF narration were too much for me.** At least I managed to uphold my 30-percent-before-I-quit rule.

Mini review to come closer to the release date.

[DNF @ 30%]

Nora Baskin says

I read this story in an early draft and my first response was..Damn, she nailed it. Ms. Polisner captures the truest sense and expanse of a young man's emotions-- his complicated relationship with his mother, the loss of his dad, and his romantic heart aches. She also beautifully renders his descent into confusion when all three collide, and his journey to redemption. Consider this book, ORDINARY PEOPLE for a new generation of readers..it's that good.

Oona says

Please note that this review is written by a teacher with the intended audience of educators. I make specific recommendations for how to consider this novel for addition to curriculum, so if you don't want to nerd out with me, skip this.

I received an advanced reader's copy of this novel at the NCTE convention and was able to read the book in just a few sittings once I began it. I value this novel most for its reflection of real life, artistry in details and consistency in craft. The main character, Klee (pronounced Clay), is simultaneously grieving both the sudden loss of his father and his mother's austere response to the death. His response to being uprooted from city life and transplanted, in his final year of high school, to a comparatively provincial northern suburb, is realistic. Klee's loneliness and longing for connection are palpable. Polisner writes Klee's internal monologues convincingly, and her use of flashback and flash forward is intentional. I especially liked the two strong female characters who aid Klee in his recovery, one of whom is a mental health professional, and the other of whom is a Catholic nun.

I've read two of Polisner's other novels, both of which appeal to middle grades or high school students. This novel is one I'd recommend exclusively for the high school grades, due to the maturity of the content. I rarely say this about a YA novel, but this one could work as a whole-class study for eleventh or twelfth grade. Before you pitch it as such to your supervisor or principal, make sure several of your current students have read it, and ask each student to write down three reasons it should be added to your school's curriculum. I would pitch it as an alternative to a novel such as like *Ordinary People* by Judith Guest, since it has comparable themes. (Similar to swapping out *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* for *The Catcher in the Rye*.) In planning a full unit of instruction, I suggest collaborating with an art teacher and a psychology teacher. There are so many opportunities for interdisciplinary study with this text, and an English teacher cannot do it all!

Before beginning the unit, definitely take the time to pre-assess what students already know about Vincent Van Gogh, and tap into any expertise in your classroom throughout the course of the novel study. Consider reading and analyzing the following short texts in class as students read the novel: "Hanging Fire" by Audre Lorde, "Richard Cory" by Edwin Arlington Robinson, and "Digging" by Seamus Heaney. An excerpt from *Vincent and Theo* by Deborah Heiligman would also help to frame the study of the novel. Playing the songs "Vincent" by Don McLean and "The Flight of Icarus" by Iron Maiden, and analyzing their lyrics in relation to the characters in the novel would be another germane learning experience for readers.

If you offer this book as a literature circle choice, consider designing an instructional unit with these other thematically apropos novels as choices: *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven, *Still Life With Tornado* by A.S. King, *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero, *The Gospel of Winter* by Brendan Kiely, *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* by Matthew Quick, *Goodbye Days* by Jeff Zentner and *The Memory of Light* by Francisco X. Stork.

The language in this novel is colorful from its very first page, but have you heard how high school students talk? Stand in almost any high school cafeteria at lunch and listen — you'll hear far worse in a shorter span of time than what you'll see occasionally surface on the pages of this novel. To those who have gripes, I say: BFD. At its core, this is a novel about grief and shame, and when human beings try to navigate these complex emotions, language often becomes colorful. I wouldn't suggest selecting a passage rife with profanity for a class read-aloud or book talk, but beyond that, my students' lives aren't censored, and by eleventh or twelfth grade, I would hope that they're not hyper-focused on f-bombs but instead immersed in

the struggles and circumstances of the novel's characters.

Monica says

Excellent story! Fast paced, this book can definitely be completed in one sitting. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

Our main character Klee is brutally honest. At only 17, he has faced grief, trauma, and adversity. At the heart of the book is the idea we most often see what we want, what is easiest. The truth is so unclear sometimes. Particularly when it concerns loved ones. We can twist reality to match our ideas of our life story. The difficult part is removing those rose colored glasses and living in our true story, not just the one we dreamed for ourselves.

Although definitely in the YA category, I recommend **In Sight of Stars** for all readers looking for an authentic account about youth, mental illness, and forgiveness.

Thank you to NetGalley for the ARC in exchange for this honest review.

Kate Olson says

#partner * So, so many young adult books are featuring themes of mental illness now that I start thinking I know what to expect in the genre.....but then THIS book comes along and shows me how it should be done. Polisner has written a quiet and poignant look into a teen's experiences with grief, depression and desperation, and has managed to do so with the most compassionate touch I have seen. Her portrayal of mental health professionals, therapy and in-patient treatment are refreshingly positive and I am hoping they will undo the damage that many insensitive books have done for this topic. And the ART. I adore that this book is so wrapped around art and Van Gogh and Klee and his father's art. This isn't done enough in YA, which is why I'm so happy to see it here. If you have teen art lovers in your life, hand them this book. (Along with Piper Perish by Kayla Cagan - that 2017 title is fabulous too!)

Highly recommended for libraries that serve teens, and perhaps in art classrooms as well ~ because every classroom needs books!

Thanks to the publisher for the review copy of this title ~ all opinions are my own.

Richelle Robinson says

In this story we meet Klee who cuts his neck with a knife at a party. Afterwards we are transported to past plus we see what leads up to the event. Klee was going through a difficult time with a parent passing and I honestly felt he would have done well with some counseling. I really liked that we got to see what was going on with Klee and how he's been feeling the last year. Throughout this story there are some twists that I didn't see coming and now certain things make sense. We also have a romance between Klee and Sarah and that plays a part as well.

This story serves as a strong reminder that if you're going through something please reach out and talk to

someone. Klee kept everything bottled in and once he reached his limit he broke. It was so sad to him break but watching him find himself was worth ounce of heartbreak.

I've never read anything by this author and I enjoyed her writing style. I would have liked a follow up with the main character. I felt like the ending was a little abrupt but overall I loved the story. The subject matter is about mental illness and I applaud the author for writing a book about this topic. Mental illness is a real thing and it's nice to see more books being written. Okay, I'll stop with the PSA.

Received copy from NetGalley and I voluntarily left a review
