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## **The Peppermint Pig** Nina Bawden

Johnnie was only the runt of the litter, a little peppermint pig. He'd cost Mother a shilling, but somehow his great naughtiness and cleverness kept Poll and Theo cheerful, even though it was one of the most difficult years of their lives.

## **The Peppermint Pig Details**

Date : Published March 31st 1977 by Puffin (first published 1975)

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Author : Nina Bawden

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# From Reader Review The Peppermint Pig for online ebook

## Elizabeth says

This was such a sweet and touching book that I'd actually quite forgotten about. I remember reading it as a child with my mom and dad and really liking it. What actually made me reread it was a clear out of books and I noticed it was by the women who had written *Carrie's War*, another book I previously enjoyed. I was super glad that I found it and I'll definitely be holding onto it for now.

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## Cheryl says

Not really so much about the pig as about the year the children learned who their family is, and who they are, and what their place in the world might be. Even though it takes place over a century ago, it's not really historical fiction, as the world's context isn't relevant. It's actually easy to read as something that may have happened to ppl just one generation ago.

It's easy to read as just a story, but a careful reading reveals a poignant, odd, magical book, with depth. Though *Sonya Hartnett* is darker, I believe it likely she was influenced by Bawden; they give me a similar feeling of satisfaction, admiration, and even an odd kind of fierce joy. I will absolutely look for more by Bawden.

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## Kizzy says

I remember my mum reading this to me when I was about 8. I absolutely loved it but it made me cry! I definitely recommend it x

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## Amber Scaife says

A young girl, along with her mother and her brothers and sister, must move out of their nice London home and back to the countryside whence their parents came, while their father goes off to America to seek a new fortune. The story follows the family, through the eyes of 9-year-old Poll, for a year in the life as they adjust to their new circumstances and surroundings. There's also a pig involved.

A comfortable read, with lots of lovely details of rural Norfolk at the turn of the century, but it ended too abrupt and pat for me, I think.

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## Jola says

Could you possibly have guessed that this book with such a hyper-cute cover has the most inexplicably cruel ending I've ever seen in children's literature?

If 'The Peppermint Pig' (1975) by Nina Bawden was a book for adults, I would have rated it much higher. I am impressed by its nostalgic beauty and the way it evokes memories from the summers spent in the countryside, which I was fortunate enough to experience myself as a little girl. Friendships with farm animals included. I loved the way Nina Bawden captures the magic moments of everyday family life. I highly enjoyed her writing style also. 'The Peppermint Pig' is definitely a children's book, though. That's why I can see a few complications here.

Please, note that the problem might lie mostly within me, not within the book, as Nina Bawden touches – punches would be a more appropriate word here, actually - exactly the areas I am oversensitive about. One of the reviewers called this novel comforting so I might be exaggerating. It's up to you to decide.

John Singer Sargent, *'Village Children'*, 1890. [Image source]

When I read the first sentence of the novel : *'Old granny Greengrass had her finger chopped off in the butcher's when she was buying half a leg of lamb.'* – by the way, one of the most astonishing openings ever – a little red light in my mind started beeping shyly, but I ignored it, thinking that I'm aggrandizing it and that it's just the author's harsh sense of humour. Besides, my own grandmother almost chopped off her finger herself once - everything ended well, fortunately - so I really could relate to this story. The anecdote is repeated a few times throughout the novel.

If I'm overreacting, please correct me, but given the fact, that the ideal audience of 'The Peppermint Pig' are - I would estimate - 9-12 year olds, I found the following excerpts pretty disturbing:

*'Poll said, 'What do you mean about biting off puppies' tails?'*

*'That's what the groom at the Manor House used to do. My mother was cook there, you know. I've seen that groom pick up a new litter one after the other, bite off the tail at the joint and spit it out, quick as a flash. The kindest way, he always said, no fuss and tarradiddle, and barely a squeak from the pup.'*

*'She hit him in the stomach, he grunted and fell and she fell on top of him. He tried to get up but she grabbed his hair with both hands and thumped his head up and down.*

*She couldn't move but Noah's laughing face was above her so she spat into it as hard as she could and said, 'Damn you, you rotten bug, damn and blast you to hell...'*

*'She made a best friend called Annie Dowsett who was older than she was and who told her how babies were born. 'The butcher comes and cuts you up the stomach with his carving knife,' Annie said.'*

*'Theo was wild with rage and that gave him the advantage. He broke loose and punched Noah in the throat, a murderous blow that made Noah gurgle and gasp. Theo hit him again, in the stomach, and Noah doubled over and fell. Theo kicked him as he lay crumpled against one of the tombstones. Poll saw Theo's face, pale and exultant and terrible, and shouted, 'Stop, oh stop, Theo,' but although he turned his head briefly towards her he took no notice of her anguished cry. He flung himself on top of Noah and fastened his hands round his neck...'*

Pierre Auguste Renoir, *'Jean and Genevieve Caillebotte'*, 1895. [Image source]

Well, I know it's almost nothing compared to the computer games some kids play every day but these scenes made me feel uneasy, especially when I realized the age of the readers this book was intended for. I'm fully

aware of the fact that children do fight and that both Pol and Theo had the right to feel angry, having been bullied by nasty Noah, but in this novel aggression seems to be an instinctive and effective way to solve conflicts.

In my opinion there is quite a mess as far as the idea behind the text is concerned. I think children at the age of 9-12 definitely need a more clear distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, than the one provided by Nina Bawden. The author's message is not clear to me at all, so I wonder what children would make of it.

I assume one of Bawden's intentions was to discourage children from telling lies and hiding the truth. As aunt Sarah used to say '*what a tangled web we weave when once we practise to deceive...*' Apparently, I think the author got tangled in this sticky web herself: both parents in this novel deceived in a way too. Speaking of parents, the explanation of father's decision, which changed the lives of the whole family and affected their economic status dramatically, sounds a bit absurd to me.

I'm really trying hard to understand why the author decided to end the story in such a cruel way. Maybe the novel was based on real memories, which is quite possible as the book was dedicated to her grandmother, and she wanted to be accurate at all costs?

The ending of 'The Peppermint Pig' felt as if the author slapped me in the face. Literally.

I don't expect good endings at any price but the awfulness of Nina Bawden's version lies not only in **what** happened but also in the hidden message behind it: basically, you can't really trust the adults you love. In my opinion nothing can excuse mother and aunts' decision, albeit the author tries hard, emphasizing its financial aspect.

Ferdinand Puigauadeau, '*Chinese Shadows, The Rabbit*', 1895. [Image source]

I did my best to figure out what this ending is supposed to teach children and the only answer I have is 'don't trust the people you love as they might do something traumatic to you, behind your back'. Would you like to learn something like that at the age of ten?

I felt astounded when I found out that 'The Peppermint Pig' was written in 1975. I thought it was a book from the beginning of the twentieth century. The lack of author's empathy would be easier to swallow then. I understand that 'The Peppermint Pig' portrays the past, the end of 19th century to be exact, when the model of parenting, the role of children in family and mentality were quite different but do you think it's rational to expect a historiosophical distance from a ten year old?

The thing, that shocked me most, was the lack of respect for child's feelings, demonstrated especially by one of the aunts who was a teacher (!), a headmistress to be exact. The thing she does to explain the reason of the tragedy to Pol is horrifying and no wonder the girl faints as a result.

I really don't want my musings on 'The Peppermint Pig' to sound like a gloomy and definite verdict discouraging you from reading this novel. As I've already said, there were things masterly done in it. For example the wistful atmosphere, the bitterish sense of humour and psychological portrayals of the family, especially the kids.

I wonder what my reaction to this novel would be if I read it as a child. I was notorious at our school library

for having read all books about animals available there, so I would have probably got hold of it sooner or later, but it hadn't been translated into Polish. Frankly speaking, I don't regret it. Brothers Grimm's version of 'Cinderella' with cut toes, bleeding afterwards, made me slightly sick, so granny's finger might have been the final straw.

I wholeheartedly agree with those who believe that you must write for children the same way you write for adults, only better. To my mind, beside of literary high quality, though, empathy and respect for young reader's emotions and sensitivity are essential.

Hans Thoma, '*Kinderreigen*', 1872. [Image source]

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### **Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says**

I could write about this book all day. Who knew this would be such an intriguing book? The cover didn't lead me to think this. The title didn't lead me to think this. But I knew from page one that this was a special book.

It's a little story of a family that is set around the turn of the century. The father has to leave his job abruptly and decides to pursue a new career in America. The mother and four children are left in England, staying with two elderly aunts, while the father gets settled.

There's lots in this little story...a ghost story...a friendship with an impoverished child...a long sickness...and, of course, a pig.

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### **Lisa says**

So sad. You need to read it right to the end.

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### **Yusuf Bnvlent says**

Overall, This book is really worth to read. There are some intriguing events which compelled me so much. But, I didn't see that the pig becoming a main character of the story. I didn't so much attached to the pig itself unfortunately.

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### **Keren Dibbens-Wyatt says**

Bawden is a great writer. I just couldn't bear to recommend this very highly because it is so deeply upsetting. You are left bereft and uncomforted at the end, and whilst some may feel that is something a child needs to experience as a reader, I disagree. I also don't think it is signposted well enough for the age of reader, and so I wouldn't give it to a child to read. It left me feeling like I had an open wound, and I'm in my forties!

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### **Becky says**

Revisiting my childhood with this book that I first read 30 years ago, a bittersweet tale of life in the early 1900s when money was scarce. Told through the eyes of a 9 year old it makes you glad we have a welfare state now.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

Entertaining, funny and definitely a classic, *The Peppermint Pig* is a great animal story, but beyond the pig aspect of the book, there's a commentary on a historic time from the viewpoint of children living in it. This book is excellent; if you love stories like *Charlotte's Web*, you'll love this one.

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### **Jess says**

Poignant and heartbreaking for all its gritty humour. Its ending, in particular, drives home the devastating sensation one has when realising that one has irretrievably lost something- and one who ought to have known and sympathised has, and can have, no idea. Johnnie (the eponymous pig in question) will capture your heart and live on in your mind long after the story closes. A beautiful reflection on childhood and- on second reading- a mother's attempts to shield her children by their innocence.

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### **Rachel says**

It was a really enchanting book. I liked Johnny the pig and the whole Greengrass family.

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### **Brian McLean says**

Father loses his job, and while he seeks his fortune in the States, the family move from fashionable London to a tiny Norfolk town. Poll (aged 9-10) is the one of the four children we hear most from and a wonderfully assertive, yet well-intentioned person she is too. I won't say anything about the beloved pig - read for yourselves. I'd say this is a most enjoyable and worthwhile read for all aged 10 upwards. This is Nina Bawden at her best.

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### **Amy says**

I read this book before going to bed and it was a quick read and a nice historical fiction book. Poll's father

leaves for the Americas and while he is away the family gets a pig named Johnnie. Money is tight but time passes with Johnnie's company. I enjoyed the imagery and the ending too. It is almost enough to make you want to go vegetarian in empathy for Poll.

I have just read some of the other reviews and I did not know that this book was intended to be a children's book. It is a bit rough at the ending for a kid but then again, it is from a different era. Either way, the writing is excellent.

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### **Sarah Sammis says**

The first time I read the book I left it in a Solvang motel and had to use my allowance to call the motel and arrange for shipping. I've never made that mistake again.

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### **Liz says**

Warning, you'll need your hankies for the ending. Loved this as much, reading it to my nine year old, as I did when I was a child. Reminds me of The Railway Children, but with pigs instead of trains ;)

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### **Clare says**

The Peppermint Pig was one of my favourites as a little girl, I think maybe because it is quite different and I loved the dark violence towards the end. As a little girl I found books that left you with a slightly bitter taste fascinating.

I re-read it a few years ago and loved it still but this time for Nina Bawden's writing and storytelling genius. Its comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. I just love her.

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### **Rhian says**

Traumatic (you can see it coming) but beautiful.

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### **Dannielle Potts says**

A Lovely Children's Book Which Made Me Cry. Not Sure If Is Let Me Daughter Read It As She's Very Sensitive And Such An Animal Lover. Beautifully Written

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