



Unbound: A Novel in Verse

Ann E. Burg

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From the award-winning author of All the Broken Pieces and Serafina's Promise comes a new novel-in-verse that is a gripping, transcendent story about a little-known piece of slave history.

The day Grace is called from the slave cabins to work in the Big House, Mama makes her promise to keep her eyes down. Uncle Jim warns her to keep her thoughts tucked private in her mind or they could bring a whole lot of trouble and pain.

But the more Grace sees of the heartless Master and hateful Missus, the more a rightness voice clamors in her head-asking how come white folks can own slaves, sell them on the auction block, and separate families forever. When that voice escapes without warning, it sets off a terrible chain of events that prove Uncle Jim's words true. Suddenly, Grace and her family must flee deep into the woods, where they brave deadly animals, slave patrollers, and the uncertainty of ever finding freedom.

With candor and compassion, Ann E. Burg unearths a startling chapter of American history -- the remarkable story of runaways who sought sanctuary in the wilds of the Great Dismal Swamp -- and creates a powerful testament to the right of every human to be free.

Unbound: A Novel in Verse Details

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Author : Ann E. Burg

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From Reader Review Unbound: A Novel in Verse for online ebook

Starjustin says

Unbound: A Novel in Verse depicts the life of a 9 year old girl, born into slavery. In this fictional novel, the reader follows Grace and her family through trials and tribulations they must endure on the road to freedom.

A quick read book that I would recommend to anyone. A very captivating story from beginning to end.

Yapha says

This free verse novel follows the story of Grace as she is torn from her mother and brothers and sent to work in the Big House, due to her light skin. Grace and her family are slaves on a plantation near the Great Dismal Swamp. Only nine years old, Grace promises her mother that she will keep her eyes down and her thoughts to herself, but she sees new things every day that cause her to question why things are the way they are. The injustice of it all becomes too much for her, threatening her entire family. A powerful look at the horrors of slavery and the bravery and resilience of those who lived through it. Highly recommended for grades 4 & up.

David says

I really liked reading Unbound because its one of the best novel in verse I've read. I like how the author put in detail in the little things. I would recommend this book to people who like novel in verse

Aryana Parmar says

3.5 stars really... it was a good book but it wasn't the best of the caudills for sure. Anyways, read it if you like books in verse... uh, yeah.

Nancy Kotkin says

Novel-in-verse about slavery. At nine years old, Grace is no longer a child. As the story opens, Grace is just about to become a house slave for the Master who owns her mother and stepfather. She is rightly terrified and, as it turns out, not very good at practicing submissiveness or blindly following directions. As a result, the tobacco plantation owners decide to sell off Grace's mother and both the stepbrothers Grace has been helping to raise. But Grace and her family would rather live in the Great Dismal Swamp than face the auction block. In order to stay together, they flee into the wilderness, where they will at least be free. If they survive.

This is historical fiction. There really is (or was?) a Great Dismal Swamp spread across parts of Virginia and North Carolina, and it was used as a refuge for runaway slaves. There is another slave in the story who runs

away "up North" and that option is also discussed among Grace's family. Slave catchers, called Paddyrollers, are much feared by runaways, and with good reason. This novel looks at slavery from a variety of angles: life as a field slave, life as a house slave, life as a runaway slave in hiding, and life as a runaway slave who migrates. For this reason, this book makes an excellent educational resource.

The element of the novel that I find most brilliant is the lightness of Grace's skin color. It is never mentioned, but Grace is most likely the child of her mother and the slave "Master." When Grace was five years old, Mama "jumped the broom" with Jim, another slave who is Grace's stepfather. ("Jumping the broom" was the marriage custom practiced by slaves because slaves could not marry by law.) The author makes excellent use of Grace's skin color. In the beginning, Grace rubs mud all over herself to look more like her family members. Later, there is a discussion among Grace's mother and stepfather over whether or not to send her "up North" because she is so light-skinned that she could "pass" as Caucasian. It is her light skin that makes her desirable as a house slave, because she looks more like the white plantation owners. It is probably also her light skin that makes the "Missus" despise her so, though this is an inference never explicitly stated in the book.

A bit didactic in places, and often shies away from any deep conflict or tragedy. For example, Grace is once slapped in the face by the Missus, but she is never whipped, which is unrealistic, especially given her tendency to show her feelings openly and to speak her mind. But I think these were conscious choices made in order to slot this book into lower middle grade. And it does make a wonderful, if cleansed, introduction to slavery that can be read and digested by children as young as fourth graders. Despite the length (about 350 pgs), it's a very quick read, since it is written in free verse. Would also be good for reluctant readers, if they don't mind the fact that the protagonist is only nine years old. Not sure why this book didn't get any Newbery attention.

Lily says

I loved, loved, loved *Unbound* because of the unique choice of writing the novel in verse. While the story was a quick read, it felt unified in a way that made you want to read more. However, the end was a bit of a cliffhanger. I wish the author wrapped up the story more. Overall, the story was one of my favorites I have read so far.

April says

Grace is pulled from the slave cabins to work in the Big House. Despite warnings from her mother and Uncle Jim and others to just "keep her eyes down and her mouth shut" Grace can't tamp down on her "rightness voice". Grace and her family flee slavery into the deep swamps in search of Freedom. This verse-style story is meant for middle-grade readers but could be enjoyed by adults as well. The plot of Grace and her family as slaves and then working to escape to the Great Dismal Swamp is a nice departure from the usual historical slave narratives which tend to focus on paths leading to freedom in the North. It's compelling and thought-provoking; would be good for a book club read.

Anything you didn't like about it? The voice of Grace is at times overly "young" which contrasts with other points where she is wise beyond her years (especially in vocabulary) but it doesn't detract from the story.

To whom would you recommend this book? Would be a really compelling read for mother/daughter book groups. Similar to Brown Girl Dreaming in style/content but meant for a younger audience. A good one for reluctant readers or kids wondering about slavery in America.

Who should buy this book? Middle schools, public libraries

Where would you shelve it ? Middle grade (Historical) Fiction

Should we (librarians/readers) put this on the top of our “to read” piles? Not necessary though it reads quickly due to the format.

FTC Disclosure: The Publisher provided me with a copy of this book to provide an honest review. No goody bags, sponsorship, “material connections,” or bribes were exchanged for my review.

Andrew Blok says

This book is great. You should read it. It won't take long. Do it!

A novel in verse from the perspective of Grace, a young, slave in antebellum North Carolina (most likely), *Unbound* tells a story of oppression with a newer focus. Instead of focusing solely on the physical horrors of slavery, Grace's story, which certainly deals with the physical, focuses on Grace's conception of her personhood.

Grace is told, when she goes to work in the Big House, that she must "learn her place" as one without agency. She wonders how her master and mistress can hold themselves in such high regard when they don't (or can't) do things for themselves. She wonders how to accept the slave who seems to have learned and accepted her place as less than human. She wonders what place she might fill in the master's house that doesn't further hurt her and her family. She considers this all and risks everything she has — everything her masters are trying to strip from her — to find or create her own place, where the contradictory and inhuman systems she lives with do not apply.

Mischenko says

I'll start by saying this book was amazing! My daughter made me read it. It's juvenile fiction, but what an amazing story about a family who would risk everything to escape slavery. It's a novel written in verse so it's a fairly quick read. I was in all the way until the end and didn't want to put it down.

The only problem I had was wanting to know what happened to some of the characters at the end of the story. You're left to wonder just like Gracie.

I would recommend this book to anyone!

5 *****

Tara Warmerdam says

A beautiful, important story. I will write a full review in a few days. For now, I want to dwell in the lovely language and the powerful ending to this story while I think about my review. I am already returning to reread my favorite passages....

Susan says

I want to read this to my fourth-grade class. No, I need to read it to them. They need to hear Grace's story, and - living in Virginia - they need to have a heartfelt connection to the Great Dismal Swamp. Ann Burg has accomplished a great work in capturing words to describe hope in the face of the horror of slavery, all in a manner appropriate for middle-grade readers. Hope embodied by the courage and sacrifice of others. Stunning.

Sam says

I read *Unbound* in one night. It's an easy read, thanks to the verse and colloquial writing style that feels natural to southerners. But just because it's simply written, doesn't mean it doesn't have punching power.

Unbound is a beautiful, spiritual story of young, light-skinned Grace (a house slave) who digs herself (and her entire family) into a horrible situation when she speaks up for what's right. Grace & her family must escape into the Great Dismal Swamp to avoid the worst kind of retaliation, and along the way, a beautiful story about forgiveness, faith, family, and yes, freedom, is weaved. (The four Fs, perhaps?)

I would recommend this novel to any child reluctant to read a work of historical fiction and who also needs insight on the cruelty of slavery. I would also recommend this read to most people, just because it's so quick and soulfully written.

Richard Denney says

5 STARS!!!

This was such a beautiful and heartbreakingly read. Grace is such a strong and heroic character and I loved reading from her POV in verse. I'm not sure what year this takes place in but know it's about slavery and in some parts of the country it's been abolished but in Virginia, where this story takes place it hasn't been taken care of yet, which is the reason Grace and her family are considered runaway slaves and are trying to get to freedom, wherever that may be. In short, if you're looking for something that will tug at your heartstrings, bring tears to your eyes, and showcase a part of history people like to pretend never happened, then pick this up ASAP. I can't wait to get a copy for my shelf.

- Richard

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Outstanding novel in verse about Grace, a slave girl who, with her family, escape to the interior of the Great Dismal Swamp rather than be sent to the auction block. Characters who speak in the language and accents of the times, combined with details of period life, lend authenticity to the tale. Not long ago I saw on a segment of "Mysteries at the Museum" that an anthropologist looking for traces of the escaped slave and Native American settlements in the swamp finally found the outlines of cabins and dug up small artifacts. Burg actually met this anthropologist in the course of her research for this book, and I'll bet that the broken China button that Aunt Sara gave to Grace as a remembrance was one of those artifacts. The idea of living in the midst of that swamp must have been so appealing for its sense of freedom, worth risking its natural dangers. Young readers will learn through Grace's eyes about the evils and injustices of slavery, and will be questioning with her why these things had to be. They will certainly be rooting for Grace and her family as they flee. I highly recommend this suspenseful and thoughtful story to adults as well as children. Outstanding!

Claire says

This book was amazing! Grace was so brave and smart! Everyone NEEDS to read this book!
