



Out of Left Field

Ellen Klages

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A story about the fight for equal rights in America's favorite arena: the baseball field!

Every boy in the neighborhood knows Katy Gordon is their best pitcher, even though she's a girl. But when she tries out for Little League, it's a whole different story. Girls are not eligible, period. It is a boy's game and always has been. It's not fair, and Katy's going to fight back. Inspired by what she's learning about civil rights in school, she sets out to prove that she's *not* the only girl who plays baseball. With the help of friendly librarians and some tenacious research skills, Katy discovers the forgotten history of female ball players. Why does no one know about them? Where are they now? And how can one ten-year-old change people's minds about what girls can do?

Set in 1957--the world of Sputnik and *Leave It to Beaver*, saddle shoes and "Heartbreak Hotel"--*Out of Left Field* is both a detailed picture of a fascinating historic period and a timelessly inspiring story about standing up for equality at any age.

Out of Left Field Details

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Author : Ellen Klages

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From Reader Review Out of Left Field for online ebook

Jessica says

I received this book for free from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

I love historical fiction and I love baseball and I love girls standing up for what they believe in, so of course I loved this!

I have a lot to say about this book.

First, I LOVED that it took place in the Bay Area, because I am from the bay. The SF Giants are mentioned in this and they're my favorite team (Go Giants!). Additionally, I liked that it talked about the San Francisco Seals because truthfully I've never heard of them.

I also loved the diversity. One of the main character's friends, PeeWee Ishikawa, is Japanese American and at one point in the novel he brings up Japanese internment. I always appreciate it when books mention Japanese internment because it is something that still gets overlooked at times. I'm glad the book acknowledged it. Her other friend, Chip, is black and through her friendship with him she learns all about the Negro League and how the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was white only. That made the book intersectional so I was really happy to see that.

If you didn't already guess it, this book is jammed pack with information, both baseball and not baseball related. I ended up learning a lot about the history of women in baseball. The book takes place in 1957-1958, so it incorporates real life events that happened in those years as well (The Little Rock Nine, Sputnik, etc.).

The overall storyline was good. It did a really tremendous job at showcasing how unfair it is that girls can't play Little League.

As a random side note, I loved the little mention of Walt Disney and his television program. I love Disney so any mention of him is always a plus in my book.

Overall, this was an amazing, informative, and inspirational book, and if you read it, be prepared to be schooled in women's baseball!

Sarah Smith says

How many people are going to say "This is a home run"? Well, me too. Katy Gordon, 10 years old, has a great pitching arm and wants to play Little League; but she's a girl and it's 1957. She reinvents herself as "Casey," but when she's discovered, Little League officials tell her that girls have never played baseball.

Really? Is she the only one? Katy's quest to find another woman baseball player leads her to hundreds of them, and to the history-suppression that made them invisible. With the help of her mother and sisters, teachers, friends, and some of those real-life women, Katy explores the sexism and racism that are as much

part of America as baseball, and learns not to ignore it nor be destroyed by it.

OUT OF LEFT FIELD doesn't flinch at the hard parts. There's a devastating scene when Katy interviews a former baseball player, clearly destroyed at the loss of her career. But the whole book is a shout of praise: to the community that helps each other, to audacity, to diversity, and, with all its faults, to baseball.

Bonuses: the wonderful scene of the last game of the San Francisco Seals; Kately's delight in research and STEM; the evocation of the first days after Sputnik; a glorious final scene in which the San Francisco Giants--but why spoil it?

I'm already making a list of the girls and women I'm giving this book to.

ambry says

This is a book about baseball and library research, and it should not be as thrilling as it is, but Katy's earnest voice gives even the mundane urgency and heart. I love that it ends not with victory but with the message that sometimes the struggle for justice is worth engaging in for its own sake, regardless of outcome.

Christy says

This middle grade historical novel, set in Berkeley in 1957, is a winner. It starts strong: a reader coming to the book knowing nothing about it could easily assume that the spunky baseball-playing first-person narrator is a boy, as does the Little League recruiter who sees the ace pitcher at a neighborhood game. I also love the book's ending, which is satisfying without being pat. Katy has worked so hard to try to convince the Little League to change its no-girls rule, without success. But she has learned a great deal, had some amazing experiences, and knows that she has laid the foundation for the girls that come after her.

In the middle of the story, as Katy sets out to prove the Little League wrong, she starts at the library and then tracks down women ball players to interview. The book is packed with information about the history of women in baseball in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their struggles against entrenched sexism as well as racial segregation. The novel touches as well on many events and issues of concern in the 1950's from the school desegregation fight in Little Rock to the launch of Sputnik to a classmate's report about his Japanese grandfather's unjust internment during World War II. Kids reading this will absorb a great deal of history, provided in an accessible and age-appropriate manner. Note that some terminology may seem outdated, as it was in use in 1957 (e.g., Negro).

The very appealing hero, Katy, is a fighter who benefits from the strong support of a nuclear scientist mom and two creative and brilliant older sisters, as well as an excellent young teacher and helpful and understanding (and multicultural) friends. It's a well written page turner. And I appreciated the back matter: brief biographies of a dozen female players, an author's note explaining the history of Little League rules, and suggested reading.

A great book for young readers--and definitely not only baseball fans.

(I reviewed an advance reader copy from @kidlitexchange; all opinions are my own.)

Julie says

The first few chapters went slowly for me, but the plot pacing picked up by chapter 7. This is a great recommendation for baseball fans, female athletes, and anyone interested in history and the (ongoing) fight for equality. The “Meet Katy’s Heroes” section provides a great overview of women in baseball.

Meghan says

I don’t like sports books. I’m not interested in sports, period. So that makes it doubly impressive that I couldn’t put this book down!

Katy Gordon is the best pitcher in the neighborhood, hands-down. She’s so good that she impresses a passing Little League recruiter and he invites her to tryouts. Naturally, she makes the cut and everything’s awesome!

...except that it’s 1957. Girls are not eligible for Little League, period. No exceptions. She may have passed as a boy for tryouts, but some kid’s mom rats her out and she’s immediately cut from the team. Okay, so Katy writes a passionate, logical, well-reasoned letter to Little League asking them to allow her to play. Surely that’ll work, right?

Nope. They send her back the most frustratingly condescending reply, saying girls aren’t physically capable of playing baseball, that she’d only be a distraction to the boys, that baseball has always been a male-only sport from day one, and that she should really consider cheerleading for the boys or helping the moms provide snacks.

Yeah, I saw red, too.

Furious, Katy sets out to prove them wrong. She lacks the resources necessary to scientifically prove that her physical fitness is just as good as the boys, and the “distraction” claim is practically impossible to prove or disprove. So she decides to challenge the idea that no other girl has ever played baseball before.

Quick! TO THE LIBRARY!

Katy’s research uncovers Jackie Mitchell, who struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig back-to-back. But Katy doesn’t stop there, she digs deeper and finds even more women baseball players, writes letters to them, gets interviews, even meets a few. All of them have stories to tell about the sexism that denied them the chance to play the game they loved because of their gender.

And soon, Katy finds it goes further than gender, too. She meets Toni Stone, one of the first African American women to play on the Negro League*. And here’s where we learn about when racism and sexism intersect. All those white women players and recruiters? Weren’t looking to recruit black women, no matter how good they were. Her all-male team? Didn’t think women should play baseball! Stone tells about her experiences, things we would consider mind-bogglingly racist today but were commonplace in the 50s. “It was hell,” she says.

Armed with all of this information, will Katy be able to convince Little League to let her play before she ages out? Will her efforts help open the door to other girls wanting to play ball?

This book was surprisingly engaging and informative. Katy learns about so many women baseball players that I'd never even heard of! The back matter of the book includes biographies for twelve of the players mentioned, plus information about Little League's policies, Title IX, and the current state of women in sports.

So much of our history is ignored, forgotten, or deliberately erased because our (western) culture doesn't value the contributions of anyone nonwhite and non-male. And not just in sports, too. I hope this book encourages kids to dig deeper, to not stand by and let injustices slide, and to speak up and let their voices be heard.

(*Did I mention this book takes place in 1957-58? Yeah, this book takes place in the late 50s, when things like Sputnik and the Little Rock Nine were current events. It was a much different world then, and the language in the book certainly reflects that.)

Debbie Notkin says

Ellen Klages is a friend, and I'm also a fan of her writing, including her young adult historicals *The Green Glass Sea* and *White Sands, Red Menace*. This book follows the younger sister of the two girls who are the protagonists of the first two books. Katy Gordon is a young baseball pitcher in the late 1950s, struggling with the widely held notion that baseball is a man's sport.

When that belief flies up and hits her in the face, Katy goes on a historical tour through the long, deep, and mostly forgotten history of women's baseball, learns a lot, and meets some fascinating people. Like her older sisters Dewey and Suze, Katy is a believable, likable protagonist and her story is engaging. My only complaint about the book is that it's a little skewed toward the historical (not just baseball history) at the expense of possible character development and plot.

Nonetheless, I enjoyed it thoroughly. Definitely for the baseball players and fans in your life.

Kris Patrick says

To borrow from another Goodreads reviewer, *Out of Left Field* has strengths and weaknesses. I can't get past the weaknesses enough to give it more than three stars.

To choose one, I'm not a fan of anything that perpetuates a tomboy / non-tomboy binary. For one, I don't like the term tomboy the same way I can't stand the phrase girly-girl. Puke. Girls come in all shapes, sizes, and haircuts (!) with a wide and complex list of interests. An interest in indoor activities such as cooking and crafts doesn't automatically make a girl boring and shallow. Interest in playing outdoors with boys doesn't automatically make a girl an open-minded, collaborative leader.

Emmie says

When Neil Gaiman praises a book you know it's going to be good! Set in 1957, *Out of Left Field* is a great middle grades read aloud filled with historical references AND gumption. I'm looking forward to teaching

this one!

Amber says

I adored this historical fiction middle grade novel about a girl that fights the status quo when she isn't allowed to play baseball with the boys. If you are a fan of *A League of Their Own*, you **must** read this book. I WILL be adding this to my classroom library and possibly reading it aloud in the spring.

Amy says

When reading and reviewing middle grade books, I try to consider how 10 year old me would like the book. 10 year old me would absolutely have loved *Out of Left Field*. In fact, I'm a bit disappointed this book wasn't around when I was 10, because I'm pretty sure if it was I'd have read it so many times. While I wasn't able to enjoy this book at age 10, adult me loved it as well.

Set in San Francisco in 1957-1958, *Out of Left Field* tells the story of a ten year old baseball player, Katy. After a Little League coach witnesses Katy's stellar pitching skills she's invited to tryout, and makes the team - until it's revealed that she's a girl, and thus in violation of the rules.

Upset that the opportunity to play Little League ball has been taken from her, Katy begins to research the history of women baseball players, discovering a story very few know about.

In addition to the sports story, this is an excellent work of historical fiction, covering Sputnik, the Space Race, and the Civil Rights movement. There is a diverse cast of characters, and many strong female characters.

As a 10 year old baseball fan, I would have loved this book. As an adult, I love this book. Baseball fans and lovers of historical fiction (of which I am both), pick this one up. It's excellent.

laurel [suspected bibliophile] says

Girls don't play baseball.

Or do they?

If you ask kids today whether or not girls can play baseball, it might depend on how much they know about the sport—and also if they've ever heard of one of my favorite movies of all time, *A League of their Own*.

But for Katy in 1957, women or girls in baseball was an unheard of thing. *She* was an anomaly, because the long history of women's leagues and women baseball players had been suppressed throughout history, even though the All-American Girl's Baseball League was disbanded a couple years before the book started.

So when she tries out for Little League, gets selected and then kicked out when they find out she's a girl, she runs into the discrimination wall for the first time (first big time).

So in addition to teaching children about the rich history of women (white *and* black—I knew there were Black women baseball players, but I had no idea that they had had a league of *their* own, in addition to the segregated men's league) in baseball, this book is about the retelling of history—about how organizations

and people sometimes gloss over or suppress people's stories and accomplishments in order to tell a narrative that suits their purposes. In this case, it was that baseball was a man's sport, and that women just weren't *physically* suited to play the All-American game—despite there being women who had struck out or outplayed some of the greatest of all times, or the fact that some famous male players got their start in *women's* leagues (and fun fact).

I haven't read any of the other books in the Gordon Family saga (yes, I know I started with the last book first—it's not really necessary to read them in order), but I loved Katy's interactions with her mom. Her mom was brilliant. Hell, I loved her entire family. They were all smart, intelligent women who were the complete opposite of what you'd expect women to behave in the 1950s.

Speaking of the 1950s, I loved that this book shows that while some things were swell—like, being able to let your kids roam freely in the neighborhoods without worrying about serial killers—many, many other things were downright awful for a lot of different people. From the placing of Japanese (and other Asian-descended citizens) into concentration camps in the 1940s (something that Katy's classmate mentioned that *everyone* had forgotten about even though it was 15 years ago—again, suppression of information and reshaping history to fit a certain narrative), to racism and desegregation, to women being shuffled back into the home life and the discrimination they faced in many fields, to the scare of communism and the rise of uber-patriotism and conservatism...well, the 1950s are definitely **not** a time I would have wanted to live in.

This would have been a 5 star read, easily, if it wasn't for historical language. I **understand** that when writing a historical fiction novel historically accuracy is paramount, **however** there are some racially charged words that today cause more harm or hurt than is warranted for being historically accurate. I loved that racism was addressed (which seems really weird but c'mon folks the 1950s was a *horrible* period for a lot of people and I'm glad that this book shows not just the lives of straight white people but how things were in a way that children would be able to understand—particularly since certain *ahem* *generations* look back and view the 1950s through rose-colored glasses)—for both Asian and Black people—but I really wished that two historical terms had not been used to describe them. There are other ways to do it that would have still been historically accurate.

Erin Buhr says

OUT OF LEFT FIELD took me by surprise and I love it when books do that.

The plot sounded good. I like books with strong girls and Katy who is determined to play baseball at all costs sounded like a girl with gumption. I also enjoy historical fiction. I've always been a bit of a history geek so I love when authors utilize the sense of place and deep history of a period as the setting for their stories.

I was expecting a good historical fiction story about a strong girl. I got so much more. This is a book full of heart and history and depth that everyone should read.

OUT OF LEFT FIELD tells the story of a girl named Katy Gordon in 1957 who makes the little league team in her town only to be told she can't play because the rules state girls are ineligible. Surrounded by a cool history teacher, a strong scientist mom, and the role model of two creative older sisters she takes it upon herself to stand up and change this policy. In the process she learns the fascinating and true history of women in baseball.

Even as I'm typing out the plot I have to admit that it sounds a little slow and a little cliche. I think that's how this book surprised me. It is a page turner and little turns out as you would expect.

The characters are so vividly portrayed that you feel like you know them and can't wait to see how their stories all turn out. It is of course Katy, flawed, impatient, determined Katy, that you root for from the start to the end, but the book is full of interesting people who all have depth and purpose and dreams that are articulated by a skillful writer.

The addition of the history only warms the pages with quirky trivia and intense details that bring alive the time of sputnik and integration and Hostess cupcakes. This is a book that confidently says we came from somewhere and that history is important and yet we are always responsible for our every day decisions.

I don't know how it's possible to write a book that includes the space race, internment camps, integration, gender inequality, baseball history and more and still have you feel like it's a gripping story of a girl standing up for herself but that is exactly what Ellen Klages has done. This is a book that should be read as much for its look at an important time in American history as it should for just being a really good story.

*Note: I received a copy of this book in exchange for my honest opinion.

Elizabeth says

I'm giving this book a 4.5. I really liked it; it was truly the perfect book for me. Ellen Klages combined fighting for women's rights with a love of baseball (with statistics included), and a deep appreciation for the public library into this historical fiction chapter book. This book needed to be written. I knew there were female baseball players, and I had previously (even somewhat recently) read a biography on Edith Houghton, and I absolutely knew that MLB is so sexist, they only just recently started hiring female commentators for to call games, and to co-host baseball shows on tv, so there are definitely no women MLB players. But I enjoyed reading about so many women that were trailblazers and fought to play. I hope some day women are permitted to play in the majors, although I believe if that day comes, it will be a separate league, such as with the WNBA and the NBA.

Richie Partington says

Richie's Picks: OUT OF LEFT FIELD by Ellen Klages, Viking, May 2018, 320p., ISBN: 978-0-425-28859-7

“Talkin' baseball!
The Man and Bobby Feller
The Scooter, the Barber, and the Newc
They knew 'em all from Boston to Dubuque
Especially Willie, Mickey, and the Duke”
-- Terry Cashman, “Talkin' Baseball” (1981)

“‘I’m Coach Martin,’ the man said. He had a strong voice that carried. ‘For almost twenty years, Little League has been open to any boy who wants to play baseball. Your race, your religion, your ethnic heritage-

-none of that matters. Little League is a true democracy. It does not discriminate in any way whatsoever. Each of you has an equal chance to make one of the teams, based only on your skills with a ball and a bat. How about that?

Half the boys gave a ragged cheer.

‘That’s the spirit.’ The man smiled. ‘Today we’re going to see how you run, hit, throw, and catch. We’ll also be watching for some things that are not so easily measured--healthy competition that includes goods sportsmanship and fair play.’ The other men nodded.

‘Success on the field comes from dedication, discipline, and--of course--practice, practice, practice!’ He pounded his fist into his hand. ‘Now who’s ready to play ball?’

This time every kid cheered, me included.

‘That’s what I like to hear.’ He tapped his clipboard.”

It’s the fall of 1957, and ten year-old Katy Gordon has grown up playing baseball with the neighborhood boys. She’s got exceptional talent as a pitcher and those boys have long respected and embraced her for that practiced skill.

Using her initials instead of her name, keeping her hair tucked out of sight, Katy easily makes her way through the Little League tryouts. But her attempt to really democratize the organization quickly short circuits when a boy from outside her neighborhood group rats her out. Katy is unceremoniously shown the door as the local adults and the national Little League organization make it clear that baseball is only for boys.

Fortunately for Katy, her mom has a bit of personal history that causes her to be supportive of Katy’s cause. Katy chooses to research women in baseball for a school term assignment, and uncovers a surprisingly long, rich history of female involvement in the national pastime. In the process, she also learns about Negro League baseball.

I loved so much about *OUT OF LEFT FIELD*. It’s a great American history story, and it’s filled with camaraderie between Katy and the neighborhood boys. Katy’s quest to document the involvement of women in baseball demonstrates to readers how top notch research was undertaken back in the old pre-Internet days, when one would employ the Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature, snail mail letter writing, and personal interviewing. And while Katy, despite her best efforts, does not ultimately get to join the Little League, she does get some pretty cool recognition for her hard work.

OUT OF LEFT FIELD will complement one of my all-time nonfiction favs, Karen Blumenthal’s 2005 award-winning *LET ME PLAY: THE STORY OF TITLE IX: THE LAW THAT CHANGED THE FUTURE OF GIRLS IN AMERICA*. It will also fit in nicely with Kadir Nelson’s Sibert Medal-winning *WE ARE THE SHIP: THE STORY OF NEGRO LEAGUE BASEBALL*.

Richie Partington, MLIS

Richie's Picks <http://richiespicks.pbworks.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/richiespicks/>

richiepartington@gmail.com
