



News girl

Liza Ketchum

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It's the spring of 1851 and San Francisco is booming. Twelve-year-old Amelia Forrester has just arrived with her family and they are eager to make a new life in Phoenix City. But the mostly male town is not that hospitable to females and Amelia decides she'll earn more money as a boy. Cutting her hair and donning a cap, she joins a gang of newsboys, selling Eastern newspapers for a fortune. And that's just the beginning of her adventures. Participating in the biggest news stories of the day, Amelia is not a girl to let life pass her by - even and especially when it involves danger!

Newsgirl Details

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Author : Liza Ketchum

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Tracy says

Another exquisite historical fiction book from author Liza Ketchum, this one captures the gold-rush frenzy of San Francisco in 1851 from a young girl's point of view. Vivid descriptions and sensory details bring the reader back in time and quickly build empathy for the hurdles Amelia, her mother, and friend Estelle face as they struggle to survive in the male-dominated city. It seems like every time Amelia finds a way to help, she also finds a heap of trouble. She dons a boy's outfit and finally breaks into the newspaper-hawking business, but she really wants to WRITE the newspaper articles—something ladies don't do, of course. No spoilers here! You have to read this delightful book yourself to find out how spunky Amelia fares.

Krys says

I finally read this. It's been getting critical noteworthy buzz for a while now. My thoughts...It delivers a lot of sensitive subject matter very intelligently... I wish it were a little better. Let's process.

"Newsgirl" is a historical fiction set in the Gold Rush period of San Francisco. It follows young Amelia, her mother Sophie, and her mother's life partner, Estelle, as the trio journey to San Fransisco to open a ladies dress shop. One thing after another occurs to the family as they try to eke out a new living in a strange new environment. Amelia learns that she can make money selling newspapers on the street...just not as a girl... so she dresses as a boy, chops off her hair, and sees what "Emile" can do to better her family's position. All the while she yearns for her absent father, whom her mother claims is "dead to her".

Ketchum manages to touch upon some pretty topical things within this story. It's a very feminist account of that period in American history. There is alot of bigoted attitude towards the non-white characters that Amelia meets...but not from Amelia. Also, her mother and Estelle's relationship is handled very well in the context of the story. Bits of historic interest are also written well, particularly panning for gold, the hot air ballon ride, the newspaper offices, and the infamous fire of 1851.

However...

The events seem one right after another... like a serialized Victorian book. Maybe it's intended...but it gets annoying. Quick. One has to suspend disbelief that all this could happen to one person. It defies realism at points. Unfortunately, I think this bit of "action packed-ness" is supposed to draw in children who have to read historic fictions for book reports. This falls flat in the ability to defy ages. Some children's books transcend ages but this...I felt like this was written in all capital letters. It's ok, it's just not perfect. I feel like this may get some prestigious nods for the content and the history lesson aspect of it... I just wish it were better. A solid 3 & 1/2 stars.

Raina says

The longer I think about this book, the more I like it. In a world dominated by (awesome) speculative fiction, this is a solidly researched historical fiction novel. Amelia is a young girl just arriving in San Francisco

during the Goldrush. She, her mother, and her mother's friend are moving there so that the women can start a dress-making business in the burgeoning city. But starting out in a new city, before their house-on-a-barge arrives, is hard. So Amelia takes it upon herself to make cash where she can by selling newspapers. But she has to crossdress to do it.

This is an adventure. The plot as I just summarized it is fascinating enough, but Amelia takes an accidental balloon ride, experiences a great fire, and acts as a scribe for the illiterate miners. There's a tonne packed into this book!

I especially appreciated the straightforward, innocent tone of the book. Although Ketchum touches on themes of child labor, gender rights, suffrage, and other heavy stuff, it's all through Amelia's child-eyes. Great, great book.

Anastasia Tuckness says

Read for a 2nd time for Battle; still don't like it much honestly! I think it is stilted and the writing gets in the way of the action.

(Jan 2010) It took me awhile to get into this book. I thought the author's style was a little stilted and the characters aren't very well developed. However, those (prob. girls) who enjoy historical fiction with a bit of adventure will like it, I think.

Set in San Franscisco during the gold rush, it tells the story of Amelia and her adventures trying to settle into the West--they've just moved from the East. She loves newspapers--ends up selling them, writing for them, and setting type for them. Other plot points--she dresses like a boy for much of the time and accidently takes off in a hot air balloon and is gone from her mother for a long time.

I thought the author had a bit of an agenda about women's rights that got in the way of the story, and I was intrigued to realize it took me 2/3 of the book to figure out the relationship between Estelle and the mother.

Abby Johnson says

When Amelia arrives with her mother and her mother's friend in San Francisco, they are looking for a new start. Little do they know that life will be so very different in this new, western town. Life is hard for the few women in this dusty town and Amelia must dress as a boy to sell newspapers and earn money.

I so wanted to love this novel, but it just moved too slowly to be entirely enjoyable. There's a great deal of historical detail and a wonderful author's note, but I just didn't find the characters or plot entirely compelling.

Nora says

I really wanted to like this book. A female lead character? Check. A story set during the Gold rush? Check. Something I would love to read again? Err... no.

First of all, the writing seemed to become preachy towards the end. It was all about the feminist movement. I felt that it pushed it much too strongly through the entire book. I understand I mean we have a girl dressing up

as a boy because she will be able to make a living... but really do you have to keep drilling it? Very repetitive.

Something else that kind of irked me was the part where Amelia's mother explains why she is unmarried and has a daughter; it is a little disturbing and emotionally devastating to a young child. Anyway... needless to say although Amelia's mother doesn't want a man around because she doesn't "love" him, she sure doesn't mind if it's her woman friend who "tags" along with them to California. Again we are talking about the 1800's.

Beth G. says

The year is 1851, and 12-year-old Amelia Forrester has just arrived in San Francisco from Boston. Her family is looking for a new beginning, but things are not turning out to be as easy as they might have hoped. San Francisco is a rough-and-tumble town full of miners, hopeful miners, and the families of miners out in "the diggings". A rough crossing through Panama forced her parents to dip into the money they had saved to get settled, and while there are plenty of ways for a young boy to earn some money, there are few jobs available for a young girl. Then, she has an idea: She'll dress as a boy and sell newspapers to help get her family back on its feet.

Complicating matters is Amelia's own family history, or, rather, the parts that she knows have been kept from her. Raised by her mother, Sophie, and her mother's "friend", Estelle, Amelia has never known her father's identity.

Amelia's knack for falling into adventures takes her from San Francisco to Sonora and back again. Period details abound, creating a picture for the young reader of what it might have been like to be a young person in Gold Rush California. There is a whole lot going on in this book, sometimes a bit too much. Both sexism and racism loom large in Amelia's world, with a few characters coming off as little more than walking examples of both. The central characters, though, are more well-rounded and realistic. The dialog sounds true to the period while usually managing to avoid falling into stilted expository speeches.

Recommend this one to fans of [The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate](#) looking for something with more adventure.

Nielson says

Amelia Forrester is one spunky girl. But it is her spunk that enables her to survive the rough-and-tumble town that early 19th century San Francisco proves to be. After Amelia, her mother, and dear family friend, Estelle, move from the East Coast to the West Coast, Amelia finds out that being a girl comes with disadvantages in this town. But despite the fact that she is a girl, Amelia finds a way to make her way as a newsgirl...by dressing as a boy! With her newfound freedom, more opportunities open up for Amelia, as well as more adventures! After surviving an accidental hot-air balloon launch, nearly being shanghaied and surviving one of San Francisco's fires, Amelia realizes the good news for her is that she is loved and alive!

Personally, I had a hard time really getting into this book. It moved a little bit slow, but I think that younger girls in the 10-15 age range would really like this book.

Lisa says

I really enjoyed this book. It's a fast-paced adventure story, an interesting window into life in San Francisco during the Gold Rush, and a coming-of-age story. Protagonist Amelia is a strong girl who chafes against the restrictions society places on girls. Her mother is much the same, and although they often argue about what's appropriate for Amelia to do, their love for each other is fierce and enduring. Her mother's "friend" Estelle rounds out their family. (Although the relationship between mom and Estelle is not the point and is never explicitly defined, the three of them are clearly a family.)

I enjoyed reading this book, I really liked Amelia and the rest of the characters, I enjoyed learning a little bit about San Francisco and the Gold Rush, and I wanted to know what was going to happen next. I look forward to reading more of Ketchum's books!

(Note: I received a free advance reading copy of this book from the publisher at an American Library Association Annual Conference. I was not required to write a positive review. Thank you, Viking!)

Martha says

An adventure story that takes place during the California Gold Rush. Although Amelia, the plucky, gender-bending heroine, is appealing, the plot was muddled and somewhat repetitive (e.g., multiple encounters with newspaper editors, multiple rescues by ruggedly independent women or token ethnic characters who appear as if by magic). The device of having Amelia and a friend spirited out of San Francisco to Gold Rush territory by the accidental release of a hot air balloon felt forced. In an author's note at the end of the book, author Ketchum admitted as much, indicating that she had read about a similar incident years ago and kept it in her idea file waiting for an appropriate use. I purchased this book for my high school library, but it would probably appeal more to middle school-aged girls and might make a good read-alike recommendation for fans of L.A. Meyer's Bloody Jack adventures.

Alexis says

Not very good.

AbbyandLisa says

Awesome... with a perfect amount of adventure

JennLynn says

This book is basically well-written and provides interesting insight into life in early San Francisco but the more I read it the less I liked it. With every chapter it became increasingly improbable. I mean being shipwrecked and becoming a newsboy and going up in a hot air balloon and nearly being shanghaied and becoming a published writer and surviving a devastating fire ... it's all way too much to happen in the space of a few months even for the most intrepid boy, let alone a girl. It's as if the author wanted to throw in every possible adventure she could think of. (And that's aside from the issue of Amelia's never married mother and all the questions that raises - and the extraordinary openness that just didn't feel right for the period either.) Maybe if the events were spread out in a series of four or five books it would have helped, but this book felt completely implausible by the end.

QNPoohBear says

Twelve-year-old Amelia Forrester is excited to arrive in San Francisco after a very long voyage from Boston. It's 1851 and there are all sorts of new possibilities for women in California that were not available in Boston. For Amelia, it also means a new start where no one knows she doesn't have a father. Amelia's mother and friend Estelle plan to open a dress shop, but they soon discover that gentlewomen are scarce in San Francisco and girls are still limited by their sex. Amelia won't let that stop her though and finds a way to undercut the gang of newsies who won't let a girl join their gang. Amelia has a nose for news and when she discovers news of a balloon ascension, she decides she's going to be first with the scoop, which leads her into a dangerous situation. Can she survive the wilds of California? Will Amelia's mother ever share her the secret of Amelia's father?

This is a great book for anyone 12+. It's listed as 10+ and though the writing is simple, there's some violence/scary situations and veiled mentions of adult conduct at the end. The descriptions of life in 1851 California were so vivid, I felt like I was there. There's no sugar coating the reality of the Gold Rush era in this book. San Francisco is a dirty, dangerous place but it's also a place of opportunity and I liked how the author presented the city both ways. It's realistic. The plot kept me reading until I found I had turned the last page. oops! I hadn't meant to read the whole thing in one night... I loved the newspaper stories. They seemed so real. Amelia's adventure is breathtaking and heartstopping. I really like the way she describes it. I felt the fire burning the city and saw history repeat itself over and over as the city was to constantly burn.

I was really interested in the secret of Amelia's father. I found that party of the story incredible implausible. There's no way a gentlewoman in Boston could have done that and not been completely ostracized. Amelia's mother is in a "Boston marriage" with Estelle. I know some women lived together and worked to support each other but I don't think any of them raised children together. I'm not certain that was permissible in Boston society. It's not really clearly spelled out in the story that Ms. Forrester and Estelle are in a Boston marriage at first but it's more clearly spelled out at the end.

Amelia is a plucky little heroine with a nose for news. She's a strong young woman who knows what she wants and goes after it, yet she also has a vulnerable side. She's not sure who she is yet or who she wants to be. She worries about not having a father and longs for a "real" family. Her emotional journey in the story leads her to understand the importance of family and what makes a family. I felt this made her seem more real than the usual hoydenish heroine. I liked how she was able to make her own way in the rough world of San Francisco and discover who she wants to be.

I appreciated the fact that Amelia's mother is not the usual stuffy proper gentlewoman. She believes in women's rights and goes her own way, yet she also wants Amelia to be a proper young lady. She's a kind and caring mother who doesn't stand in the way of her daughter's dreams like most mothers in this sort of story. Estelle is a little underdeveloped. She's kind and beautiful, an excellent seamstress, and believes in women's rights but what else?

The newsies are an interesting lot. The gang leader, Julius, seems like a nice young man who wants to better himself but it stuck because he's a child and an orphan. Nico has issues stemming from the fact his father went off to the mines and abandoned the family. He's not a very likeable boy. He's essentially the villain of the piece, along with the Alta California editor who thinks girls can't do anything. I liked little Patrick. He's still sweet and innocent because he's too young for the gang. The newsies seem better off than the boys in the gangs of New York anyway and it was nice to see a different perspective of that culture.

Jennifer says

Read for professional review. Sound hist. fic. for tweeners with a nod to nontraditional families thrown in. Well done, Liza Ketchum!
