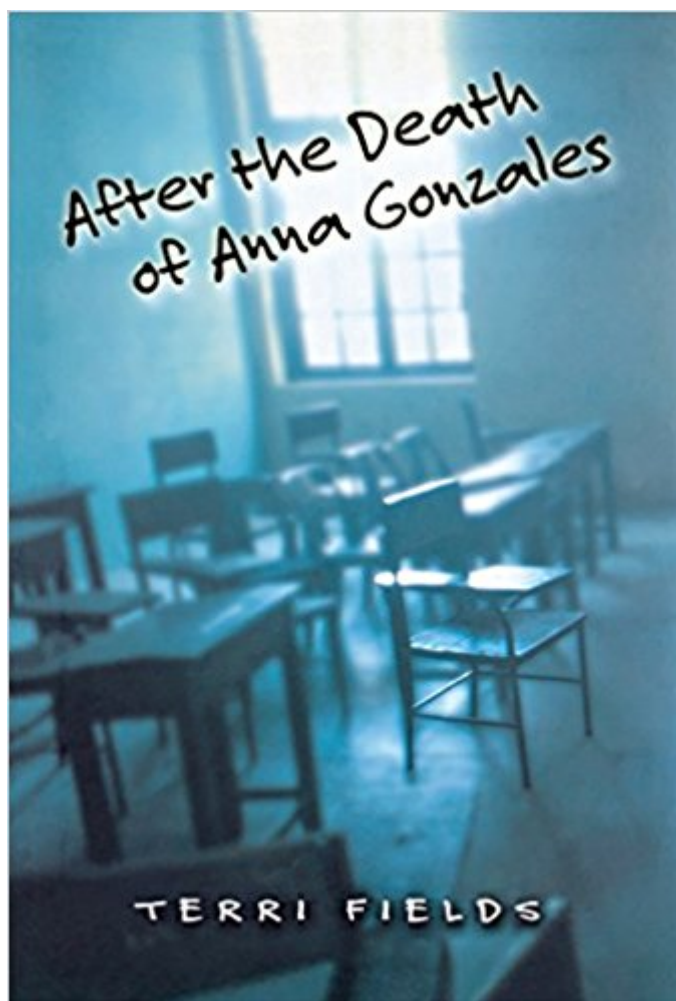


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After The Death Of Anna Gonzales



Synopsis

A powerful look at the effects of one girl's suicide on her high school
"I can feel
The whispering of the
hallway walls
Growing louder as the groups gather.
Each clique adding to its morning input."
"Did you hear?"
"Who told you?"
"Do you think it's really true?"
New at this school, I stand alone.
Watching . .
."Brutally honest and authentic in tone, this collection of voices centers on the suicide of high school freshman Anna Gonzales. Each piece, read alone, portrays a classmate's or teacher's personal reaction to the loss, taken hard by some, by others barely noticed. Read together, the poems create a richly textured and moving testimony to the rippling effects of one girl's devastating choice. Terri Fields has written a thought-provoking, important work that resonates with both pain and hope. This is a book that will stay with readers long after they put it down.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

In Fields's (Danger in the Desert) 47 poems, five adults and 42 fellow high school students respond to the death of freshman Anna Gonzales, whose suicide note closes this disappointing volume. The first voice is that of a new student who overhears hushed conversations in the hallway; ironically, she offers readers more clues to what's going on than even Anna's best friend, Alexis ("Somewhere, buried in all those words,/ Must have been a meaning I didn't understand," Alexis says, referring to a language she and Anna had invented together). Many of the poems rely heavily

on stereotypes: a cheerleader expresses her hope that Anna's death won't interfere with a homecoming rally; a smooth-talking student wonders, "A suicide./ What's my slant?" Other students seize Anna's death as an opportunity: a boy uses it as an excuse to avoid football practice, another student considers jockeying for Anna's seat in Spanish class, across from the boy she likes. The author does not describe the atmosphere at the high school nor reveal the manner of Anna's suicide. Most of the speakers are so self-absorbed that readers will likely see why Anna felt invisible ("I will slip away,/ Making little fuss./ .../ Never pretty or popular enough to matter," reads her suicide note), but because none of these poems penetrates any one character, Anna's death may, unfortunately, leave as little impact on readers as it does on her peers. Ages 12-17. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 6-9-Basketball games go on. Classes continue. Teens borrow their parents' cars. But all of this occurs without Anna Gonzales. When the high school freshman takes her own life, word spreads fast throughout the corridors and classrooms. Some students knew Anna, one sat behind her in math, one wonders why she never noticed Anna's pain. This series of loosely interwoven poems provides quick, yet insightful, glimpses into the minds, thoughts, and hearts of those left behind. Readers will first meet Anna's classmates and the adults around her, learning through firsthand views how a suicide impacts others. Athlete Damon Reingold posits, "The game doesn't always go your way./Forget fair./Feel forgotten./But damn it, Anna,/You don't stop playing." Carrie Sells wishes she could "wrap my arms/Around my world/So that I can get some control over it-." Tiffany Gibson uses whiskey to face her peers, and says, "-I die a little each day as I live through it." Only at the end do readers meet Anna through her suicide note. It's a quiet, angry, and honest missive, her good night to the world. If only she knew how it would affect others. Readers will gain some important insight into the serious issue of teen suicide through this treatment of the topic. Sharon Korbeck, Waupaca Area Public Library, WI Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I would say "Terri Fields has done it again!" but *After the Death of Anna Gonzales* is the first book I've read by this author. Terri Fields, author of more than 20 books, has crafted a wonderful book. Personally, I couldn't think of a better book to read and/or review. This book reminds me of myself at times...Feeling alone, wondering what things would be like without me, sometimes even sometimes thoughts about what it would be like to cut myself, but then I remember that even though it may be my last resort, suicide is not the answer. Apparently, Anna Gonzales disagreed with me. At some

point in our lives, I'm pretty sure we all have asked the classic question, "What would the world be like without me?" Well, Anna Gonzales didn't only ask that question, she took action. This fictional YA (Young Adult) book is a collection of poems written by 42 of Anna Gonzales' classmates and 7 of her teachers after she takes her life one dark and stormy night. Everybody expresses their feelings on this matter through their personal poems. Anna's coach wrote; The game doesn't always go your way, Forget fair. Feel forgotten. But damn it, Anna, You don't stop playing. There is nobody that isn't affected by Anna's choice to end her world. No body can comprehend why this poor soul was so tortured that she just had to take her own life? At least, not until they read Anna's poem, expressing her feelings and her side of the story. After the Death of Anna Gonzales is a heart-warming, tear-jerking book that will make any suicidal teenager realize what pain taking their life would be to others. Still having those thoughts about taking your life, ending your world, or to just say it plainly, committing suicide? Well, maybe after you read this book, you'll change your mind.

This is a fine book. I have read selections from it aloud to my students and they loved it. I think that many of the poems in this book are wonderful. Mrs. Fields is able to get into the minds of the characters and we are treated to many rich and varied voices. Mrs. Fields visited our school and spoke to our students sharing much of her experiences in writing the book, which was very interesting. The book's purpose is to steer young people away from suicide as a permanent answer to a temporary problem. What I would like to address is, does the book fulfill its purpose? In other words, what does the book really teach us about not committing suicide? It seems that by the time we finish reading we feel sad and think Anna should not have killed herself. The problem is that we learn that the only reason not to commit suicide is because of the possible adverse effect it will have on others. Is this answer good enough? I don't think so. Many of the characters in the book tell the reader that they are hurt and confused because of Anna's death. So, because of this "grief of others", one shouldn't escape his or her pain and confusion by suicide. Isn't this only a temporary answer to a desperate problem? Don't get me wrong; I do believe that suicide is an unacceptable, permanent, and selfish answer to a temporary problem. But aren't the suicidal entitled to some real and concrete answers? They need to know true answers that don't change with the situation. There are nice sounding phrases from the characters like these: "you don't stop playing.", "Anna, who had health, Chose death. How could you?", and "How could you check out before the good stuff ever started?" These solutions are situational. Basically, the characters that state them are in a situation where they see no reason right now to commit suicide. If their situation changed, it is probable their answers would too. Statistics show that almost all young people seriously think about suicide

sometime in their life. This is because of the situation they are in at the time. They must have a higher reason to keep them from committing it. The flaw I am writing about is that there seems to be no people of faith in Mrs. Field's book. How can this be? Is there no one with answers that go beyond this life? Not one character gives a grander perspective as to why we are here on earth or a real purpose for living. I find that strange because I run into people of faith all the time, coworkers, students, friends, and acquaintances. In this real world and in the book it is easy to see that selfishness runs rampant in the human race in one form or another, but no one in the book believes in a "higher cause." There are a few mentions of a "God" in the book. One is the idea that God makes girls with nice bodies and bad senses of humor, and another mention is a last desperate gasp of confusion, as in "Oh God..." Again, why was Anna supposed to choose life? Was it just to keep all these people content? Would the answers that the characters offer in the book solve a suicidal situation like the following? "I don't care anymore. So what if people will be upset if I kill myself... isn't that just tough for them? I'm sick of feeling this way... with this emptiness inside. I just want it to stop, I gotta get out." Granted, that example is a selfish and spiteful solution to a selfish problem. Does the book give a solution to this suicidal problem? I don't think it even comes close. It is a pleasant enough book but I do not really see it having any lasting answers. The book doesn't go far enough.

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