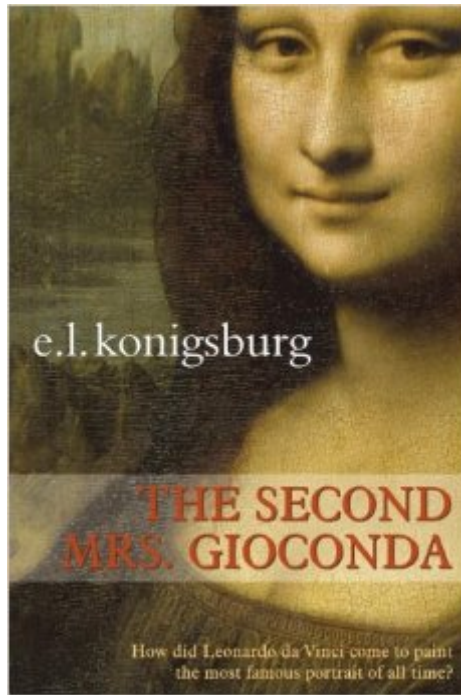


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The Second Mrs. Gioconda



Synopsis

THE GREATEST ARTIST OF HIS TIME AN APPRENTICE WITH A LARCENOUS HEART AND AN AVERSION TO THE TRUTH A YOUNG DUTCHESS WHOSE PLAIN FACE BELIES HER BEAUTIFUL SOUL Could the complex ways these three lives intertwine hold the key to a historical riddle as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa's smile -- why Leonardo da Vinci devoted three years to a painting of the second wife of an unimportant merchant when all the nobles of Europe were begging for a portrait by his hand? Only a master storyteller like two-time Newberry Medal-winner E.L. Konigsburg could create such an intriguing answer to the puzzle behind the most famous painting of all time.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 840 (What's this?)

Paperback: 160 pages

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Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.5 x 8.2 inches

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (37 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

The back of this book promises a historically-based novel about one of Leonardo's apprentices, Salai, the relationship they share with a duchess named Beatrice, and the real answer to why the Mona Lisa was ever painted to begin with. And the start of the book is exactly that: Salai, a young thief without much of a future, becomes accidentally employed by Leonardo DaVinci, the greatest artist of their time. Employed by the Duke of Milan at the time, Leonardo introduces Salai to art, the court, and to the duke's young wife, Beatrice, who is proud to be plain-faced but full of spirit. And that's about as good as the book gets, honestly. I can't really explain why I didn't like it except to say

that I feel like Konigsburg didn't know what book she was writing. The "mystery" of the Mona Lisa is never explained or even really fleshed out; in fact, the famous painting doesn't get its first mention until the last three pages. She attempts, in those pages, to draw this long, complex comparison of the woman who became the Mona Lisa to Beatrice, but it feels rushed and entirely out of place. All of a sudden, WHAM!, the explanation smacks the reader in the face. There's no subtlety, there's no craft, it just...is. Salai's interior monologue basically says And Leonardo will paint this woman because she will remind him of Beatrice, the end. It felt completely thrown together. My other challenge -- and the one, honestly, that upset me more -- was the haphazard way she threw in details that I find it hard to believe ever existed. She admits that Leonardo didn't think much of the real Salai. In his notebooks, he described him as a thief, a liar, and a mule-head.

I picked up this book mainly because I saw that it was written by E. L. Konigsburg, a given that it would be a good read. Let's just say it was, in that sense, not disappointing (especially the beginning & middle). I didn't really know that much about Leonardo DaVinci (forgive my spelling errors) before reading this, except that to describe him as a genius would be an understatement, but by the end of the book I felt as if I knew him and understood him both as an artist and a person. And I will never look at The Mona Lisa or any other of his artwork the same again. But to tell you the truth I found the end a bit disappointing. I suppose that was really my own fault though. I had forgotten that this book was based on reality and in my amnesia imagined, or to put it better had no doubts, that there would be some miraculous surprise ending. I EXPECTED a fairy tale ending. It never even occurred to me that anyone would die for real! (You see I thought that the death was fake -- a scam to fool the public. Yes, I know I have a wild imagination.) I disliked the ending because I was unprepared for it. I didn't realize I was on the last page until I was literally on the last page. You know how you can tell you're getting to the end of a book because you feel only a few pages in your right fingers? Well, that doesn't work with this book -- there are pictures of paintings by DaVinci (?) in the back of the book. I turn the last page expecting to find the next chapter but find instead that the book is done. I believe "That's it?" were my exact words. I have to say though that the end made the story even more real -- as in it would've happened in real life. The story was excellent despite my immature need for a happy ending. But I AM consistent (I felt the same after Romeo & Juliet).

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