



All Good Children

Catherine Austen

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It's the middle of the twenty-first century and the elite children of New Middletown are lined up to receive a treatment that turns them into obedient, well-mannered citizens. Maxwell Connors, a fifteen-year-old prankster, misfit and graffiti artist, observes the changes with growing concern, especially when his younger sister, Ally, is targeted. Max and his best friend, Dallas, escape the treatment, but must pretend to be "zombies" while they watch their freedoms and hopes decay. When Max's family decides to take Dallas with them into the unknown world beyond New Middletown's borders, Max's creativity becomes an unexpected bonus rather than a liability.

All Good Children Details

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Author : Catherine Austen

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From Reader Review All Good Children for online ebook

I used to read but now I don't It's bad I know says

To use one of the novel's own themes, it's a metaphor.

Being dystopian, this novel is primarily an allegory of how our lives totally suck today, and, I suppose, of how they've sucked before Christ. Ironically, the reason this novel is such a pessimistically flat read is because it offers no hope, when the quote on the back cover I suppose is supposed to be some sort of gritty paradox that ultimately unveils some empowering truth about life. (It doesn't.) Ok, it's not an exact parallel. They've taken out all righteous people; institutionalized everything (more than it is now), colored everything in monotone, created genetically-selected kids, and added a government who wants to control everyone and is using the pharmacy to do it. Oh! I'm sorry! That's not different from today! So step four is where everything different stops. The novel is filled with:

- 1) Innocent five-year-olds and parents who can't make marriages work
- 2) Lazy, whiny, self-centered, snotty violent foul self-pleasing crude haughty insecure teenage boys whose relationships with girls extend to rooting through their underwear drawers.

Now that I've outlined the content, I don't think it's quite necessary to get into the plot. Given the scenario, could anything good, true, or remotely pleasing come out of it? Could any epiphany result? Only if one isn't aware of the evil already in the world today.

To give the novel a fair chance, the author is technically a strong writer. Now back to what's making me frustrated about the minimum of one star on Goodreads.

So, I didn't want to expose myself to the total darkness of this book but I needed to know how it ended to properly review it. The plot is very slow going, and although the boys' day-to-day lives are interesting, they're interesting in a crude way. Interesting like high school boys are interesting. Throw-up interesting. The main character is such a - to use part of a common word throughout the novel - ass. I didn't mind - as long as he changed. But at the end, he has merely managed to avoid, along with his family, the government's brainwashing drugs that don't allow one to mouth off, skip school, and pull pranks and punch people in the face every chance you get as the main character, Max, does for the first bit of the novel. He's still a stupid jerk (really, he does seem quite stupid - his thought processes are very muddy and they show no higher call to intellect) and it wasn't really him who saved the family, it was his bestish friend, rich kid Dallas. There's just not any chance of redemption for this novel. It's filled with obscenities that don't make a point other than teen boys and people in general are stupid. Oh yes, Max's art. Max is also a graffiti artist. (Oh joy. Do we have to give the likes of him a spray can? No, because he steals it himself haha. Big surprise. Not.) He does a big mural at the end that's supposed to give the world hope to "Withstand". How vague. I rightly think it's the hope to withstand themselves, though with every possible force of good obliterated from the novel, it seems unlikely. The point of this novel is that the gritty institutionalized school of non-thought should be combated by the gritty egotistical self-serving jerks self-enrolled in the school of non-thought, as it were, the "Bad Kids". But friends, would that make things any better? Does the dog-eat-dog system yield anything better than what went into it? Indeed, this novel is a metaphor - a metaphor of how the world would be without any good in it. The trouble is, it tries to say that good can be found in bad, which is such a lie that it deserves to get the 0.2/10 I'm giving it.

Michelle (Bookaholic Banter) says

* Will review soon

Rachel Seigel says

This was a really well-written and thought provoking dystopian novel. I love the fact that the narrator is male, and he's got a really great voice. Intelligent, thoughtful and a bit of a smart-alek. I also like the way the friendship between him and Dallas- his best friend is drawn. There is enough background given to understand the world, but the actual story starts pretty quickly and is believably creepy. While it doesn't end precisely on a nail-biting cliff-hanger, there is certainly an indication that the story isn't finished yet and there will be more novels to come.

K.A. Wiggins says

Interesting, detailed and well-developed dystopian exploration of the future of education and corporate trends by way of a smart, artistic and angry teen. While the narrative perspective was well maintained and it didn't get preachy, there's a clear message of vigilance against current trends, and like a lot of dystopian fiction, it extrapolates current trends to an alarming place. Not an overt rebellion story a la Hunger Games or Divergent, but more of a growing awareness and opting out/escaping adverse situations. The use of art as a sort of silent protest and rallying force against oppression was interesting. Overall a fast read that leaned more toward the disturbing and realistic portrayal of intelligent science fiction than the more exciting and thriller-paced tone of some dystopian fiction.

JaceB8a says

This book is very good, and has a lot of twists.

Kathy says

I rather enjoyed this book about Max and his friends. They live in New Middletown, a company town of the great chemical company, Chemrose. Chemrose has developed a new shot that creates incredibly obedient, well behaved children. True, it's still rather experimental, but all the adults seem determined to believe it's the best thing since sliced bread. It intrigued me to see the early development of a society, like that in BRAVE NEW WORLD or THIS PERFECT DAY, that so relied on its citizens taking their chemical doses.

We first meet Max accidentally striping at the airport, when he's told to remove his belt. No one appreciates his humor. When his family gets back to New Middleton, Max is relieved to be back with his friends; he's missed the first two weeks of school. His little sister, Ally, is not so happy. She says there is something wrong with her friends. They don't want to play the same imaginary games any more. They are fuzzy, she says. Max and his Mom don't take Ally's complaints very seriously, until they notice all the first graders lining up in straight, quiet lines, waiting for the bell to go into their class, no pushing, giggling or horseplay, no waving or yelling: just order. It scares Max. He gets more scared as he learns more about the new system. His best friend, Dallas, can't believe it's as serious as Max thinks, but his father, who is determined to remold Dallas into the perfect son he wants, is a major supporter of the plan.

There was plenty of suspense, and a fair amount of humor, too. And it was kind of fun to be reading a Canadian author, after all the Australians I've gotten into lately.

Cassie says

:-)D SUPER creepy and very motivating, this is a story I'll never forget.

Bailey says

Rating: 3.5 stars

Yes, children from the ages 5-18 can be wild, and staff at school often have difficulty controlling us, but when it comes to how they control us, how far is too far? Max and his younger sister miss the first week of school, so when they come back they have no idea what happened. The children act strange at the elementary school. They are more obedient, more studious. Are they still themselves? And even more important, how did they become this way?

The premise of this story is like none other that I have heard of, so I was very interested to find out what this book is all about. All Good Children by Catherine Austen felt like a rollercoaster. It felt like I was waiting in a really long line to get on this ride, but I had to wait so long I wanted to just leave at times. Once I finally got on the ride, it was fun, but short-lived. There was so much potential, but it took over 50 pages for the book's plot to even pick up. I kept looking at the page number, wondering when something was actually going to happen. I want a story that straps me in and sends me out on the roller coaster from the very beginning because I don't like "long lines".

There were some redeeming qualities to the book after I got past page 70 something. For one, I became more attached to Max (maybe because something called the plot actually picked up, so I had a reason to root for him. Just a possibility). There were actual struggles other than petty high school fights. Max had to man up and be strong.

Ally also really pulled this story together. I usually don't get attached to younger characters (about 8 and below) because I feel like they don't really have much personality, but Ally was just darling. Every scene with Ally was pulling my heartstrings. I loved this character like she was my own sister.

Once I finished the entire book, I was glad I had. It really was a thought provoking story about a world that could become ours in years to come. Some dystopian novels manage to capture that essence, and others don't, but this one certainly did. If a sequel is written for this book, which I hope one is, I will rush to the library to pick it up. I think most any fan of dystopian novels might enjoy this book, so if you are a fan of the genre, I recommend you check this book out.

Stephanie says

My Summary: Life hasn't been what you'd call 'easy' for Max - ever since his father died three years ago, his mother, his sister, and himself have been forced to uproot their lives. Going from being filthy rich to just scraping by, Max is pretty angry about the way his life is - especially because people in New Middletown treat him like he's worthless now. Max strikes back with his art - sprawling graffiti scenes painted on every surface that will hold paint. Most would call him a trouble-maker, but Max manages to do all this while maintaining an A+ average at an academic school, so he gets away with a lot.

Until strange things start happening to the kids in New Middletown, and Max can't shake the suspicion that it's being caused by the parents in the city. As everyone he cares about begins to change - into what he calls 'zombies' - Max must fight to protect the only things he has left: his family and his art.

My Thoughts: I really, really enjoyed this novel for a number of reasons: the first of which being that it's a dystopian, but it's not too far in the future, so it's easy to envision Max's world. The second reason being that it begs the question: when does government control and involvement in our lives go too far?

I also really enjoyed the writing. The author did a great job with imagery, painting a desolate landscape inside my head. And she didn't shy away from emotion, either: unlike with a lot of protagonists, you can really see how much Max cares about his mom and little sister, along with his best friend Dallas - you can feel his desperation towards not being able to help or protect the people he loves. His emotions come across very strongly to the reader, which I love; how many times have you read a book where something happens and the protagonist goes, "oh no... this sucks"? I know I've had a quite a few, and this novel was a refreshing change from that.

Final Thoughts: I strongly recommend this novel to anyone who is a fan of realistic dystopians, and to anyone who hasn't really ventured very far into the genre and would like something not too crazy to start off their exploration. Check it out! I know I'm looking forward to a lot more from author.

Krista (CubicleBlindness Reviews) says

Wow I did not know what to expect going into this story but was completely blown away with this book. Ok so I admit that through parts of it I was wondering where the story may be leading, the side characters became a little flat for me. But after finishing the story I realized that of course when people are being drugged to "behave" that of course they are going to become flat characters. Once this realization hit and I looked back over the story, color me impressed! I really enjoyed the idea, I loved the characters and/or what the characters ended up representing.

For some reason my favorite part of the story was very close to the beginning when Max is explaining how due to a contamination in a town how the birth defects rose. The outcome of those defects truly sparked a lot of questions and interests inside of me. I found it fascinating how all children are based on certain factors, like how well bred they were because of how rich the parents were. Ok ok I know that sounds like it could be set in today's world, but it's completely different here, a whole new level. I found it very interesting that the term "recall" was used for one of the lowest grades of people.

Altogether a fascinating twist on people, life, our world and interactions with each other. It was a fantastic mix of Science Fiction and Dystopian. It brought up several of the same feelings and ideas in me that *Divergent* by Veronica Roth did.

Cait says

ALL GOOD CHILDREN by Catherine Austen has reminded me of what I want and like in a dystopian story, and delivered it with heart-pounding intensity that left me turning the pages long into the early morning when I should have been sleeping. It isn't even the action in the book that's so crazy; it's the calm way events are accepted – no, wanted – by the majority of Middletown, and the anxiety being felt by those who are daring to oppose the system.

As someone who teaches elementary school kids day after day, I found myself thinking “I wish my kids were this well behaved!” As ALL GOOD CHILDREN continued, though, the more horrified I became, and realized that no matter how disruptive or headstrong my students can be, it is much preferred to the calm, peaceful, robot-like obedience of the students in Middletown. I think my horror also came from the cavalier attitude that Catherine Austen wrote her adults as having towards the procedure (not all of them, mind you. Some of the teachers and parents are just as horrified as Max and Dallas about what is happening). How could anyone in a position of authority just disregard basic human rights like they are? The saddest part of the story is what happens to Max's neighbour Xavier after his behaviour is changed, and the disregard the adults show for his situation.

The characters in ALL GOOD CHILDREN are amazingly portrayed. Max is strong, loving and takes care of his family and friends, but he's also a bit of a troublemaker who doesn't think twice about fighting and likes nothing more than to take advantage of a chance to graffiti a wall, play football and laze around avoiding homework. One of the reasons this book impacts so hard is because of how attached you get to the characters. All the tension and anxiety bleeds through the pages and it's impossible not to cringe and laugh and want to cry.

Another aspect of ALL GOOD CHILDREN I really enjoyed? Max is African American, Dallas is white, there is a flamboyantly gay classmate and it just is, and accepted. I didn't even fully clue in until maybe a third or so of the way through the book that Max, our main character, is African American. Catherine Austen does give character descriptions as the story goes on, and Max himself mentions the difference in skin colour near the end when he and Dallas begin planning to leave Middletown since his family wouldn't be able to claim Dallas as a member, but other than that? No big deal, as it shouldn't be, and I loved that.

The behaviour modification that the government is forcing on the country's youth in order to make society better is just what I've been missing in my dystopia – a promise that this procedure will make everything ok and that our world will be the better for it, and yet it is so wrong. ALL GOOD CHILDREN is chilling and will definitely make you think twice the next time you wish you could just make someone behave the way you want them to. Perfect obedience may seem like a good thing, but when it sacrifices creativity, passion and open minds, nobody benefits, and Max is determined to keep his own personality at all costs.

Jessica says

This book was just okay. I liked the writing style. It is very comfortable and natural, written in a convincing voice that I felt represented a fifteen-year-old boy realistically. I didn't really connect very strongly with any of the characters, though. I felt like most of the focus of this book was on teenage angst and antics rather than character or plot, which is what I'm most interested in when I sit down to read a book. As mentioned, this author does a good job of convincingly and realistically conveying teenage emotions and activities, but she somehow fails to create well-rounded, convincing individuals that a reader can really get to know and become invested in.

I also felt like this book dragged. I actually almost stopped reading this book about 1/3 of the way through because nothing had happened yet, which is a big deal for me because I don't believe in giving up on books. I

really only finished this because I had nothing else to do at the time. The pacing of this book is just really slow, making even the climax and resolution fall flat, and the focus is more on Max dealing with the issues at hand as opposed to figuring out how to solve the problems. This made for an okay but not super engaging or exciting story, which is a shame because it is a really interesting premise. I was also disappointed by the ending because it does not really have any kind of resolution, but more of a temporary solution with a faint hint at blind hope that maybe things could possibly maybe change but probably not. Really disappointing.

Warnings (on a scale of 1-5):

Sexual/Body: 2 This story focuses on a bunch of fifteen-year-old boys, so it is not surprising that there are some comments made about boys checking out or discussing girls' bodies, but it is kept relatively tame and mostly just shows up in the first half of the book, likely as a contrast to the events that happen in the second half.

Gay/Lesbian: 2 For some reason, this author mentions and focuses on the boys being, pretending to be, or denying being gay even though it has absolutely nothing to do with the story. I suppose it was, again, used to create a contrast between before and after, but I personally don't believe teenage boys think or talk about it as often as this author makes them out to do.

Language: 3 The language used in this book is not excessive, but the words used are rather intense.

Christina Vasilevski says

I bought this book about a week before the official release date because the author took part in Toronto's Word on the Street festival. Her reading of some of the opening text in conjunction with her explanation of how, after writing children's books for many years, she realized she was a closet dystopian fiction junkie sold me on the book.

Max is a gifted but rambunctious teenager living in one of the few safe havens after an unspecified economic and ecologic collapse in the 20th Century. Now, most men are infertile, phrases like "going the extra mile" are outmoded because gasoline is so sparse, and most people live in squalor outside of a few cities that act as corporate enclaves. Like his peers, Max acts rowdy in class, wisecracks, and generally has a feeling of entitlement because of his education and class background, although he feels insecure about his mother's lowly status as a nurse for the infirm at a giant retirement home.

However, something strange happens. All of the children in his town begin to change. They are now lifeless. Dull. Grey. Obedient. It's all because of a "motivational learning" technique called the New Education Support Treatment, or "nesting" for short. As Max sees the consequences of this, he realizes he must find a way to save his family and friends from this fate.

One of this novel's greatest strengths is that it creates a plausible and problematic vision of the future and finds a way out that is equally plausible. You won't get the violence and improbable underground revolution of Katniss and co. from the "Hunger Games" trilogy. But you will get something more insidious. Also, while I found the first-person present-tense point of view in the "Hunger Games" trilogy to be grating and distracting, the same style of narration is used to much better, and more seamless, effect in "All Good Children."

A final note: this book is well-produced and packaged. The cover uses a colour scheme that is

simultaneously intriguing and forboding, and the choice of that elongated and spindly typeface for the title, back cover pull quote, and chapter headings really nails down the emotions inside the book - the children are so drugged into submission that even their handwriting becomes both elegant and menacing.

Lawral says

All Good Children is a great book. The world that Austen has created really is a whole lot like ours could be in, oh, 50 years (or less). The majority of the population is desperately poor and living in cars they cannot afford to fuel. The (what we now call) middle class minority works in some capacity with the booming elder care industry. Everyone has an RIG that connects them constantly to entertainment, work, communication, whatever (ie, it's what iPad aspires to be). A chemical spill has created a whole region's worth of people born with physical deformities...that compete on a reality TV show. The cities are dangerous places, and everyone has moved to gated communities (actual communities rather than housing developments) for their own safety. That they've given up a whole host of civil liberties in exchange for that safety bothers almost none of them. They even give up the right to know what vaccinations are being administered in their children's schools and why their children suddenly have no discernible personalities. It's cool though, because they're just so darn well-behaved.

Max is not well-behaved. He never has been, and if he has anything to do with it, he never will be. He, along with his best friend Dallas, struggle to maintain their own thoughts and personalities while pretending to be perfectly "good children." Their struggle was awful, but their friendship was great.

The fact that Max's mom is Black and his father was white is not a constant issue, but it is an important one. In their own community, it is a non-issue (or it's supposed to be), but outside is another story. Without the visual aid of their father, Max's mom is always eyed with suspicion while traveling with Max and his sister Ally.

Though it is published by Orca, it is not technically a hi-lo (high interest, low reading level). It's appropriate in both areas of measurement for the 12 and up set. It is, however, about a couple high school seniors and could be used as reading material for the same. I think it will be great for reluctant readers and dystopian lovers alike.

Book source: ARC provided by the publisher through the LibraryThing Early Reviewers program.

Lina says

Oh how I like me some interesting Dystopian fiction. I like it even more when said Dystopia is caused by chemical corporations. And Catherine Austen gets double points for the portrayal of a teenage boy that well, feels like a teenage boy.

But I get ahead of myself. Maxwell Connors lives in New Middletown with his mother and sister. New Middletown is centered around Old folk homes, which are big business in the future. Built, owned and managed by Chemrose. The people who live in New Middletown are all employed by the corporation. Their children go to schools run by the corporation. And everybody, whether living in a large house or a small

apartment, pay rent to the corporation. Maxwell and his little sister, Ally, miss the first week of school due to their aunt's death. When they get back, they notice that the kids in Ally's class are acting weird. They no longer play, scream, or even fight. Most terrifying of all, they are perfectly behaved and worse, it is spreading.

In her acknowledgments, Austen quips that she, "did not intend to write this as George and Harold Meet Teen Zombie Nerds in Stepford." That pretty much sums it up. Max and his friend Dallas jump off the page as real teenage boys. Not too sensitive, not perfect with the overwhelming need to do stupid things. Yet Max loves his sister. He works hard at school despite his 'tude and is obsessed with art, a love which he honed through illegally "decorating" the buildings in his neighborhood.

I don't want to give too much away, but at one point Max and his friend put two and two together and realise what is going on with the younger kids and that they are going to be next. The struggle to hold on to their identity in a sea of friends-turned-zombies is both moving and terrifying. Austen grows this tension until it reaches an insane pitch.

The world she builds is also rich with detail. It is the world how it might be in a few years- where it works pretty much the same- the opening scene has Maxwell being frisked by an airport security guard. But the uniformity, the disparity between those allowed to live in the city and the those who are not, the hierarchy created by those who can afford the best genes for their children and those who can't all ring prophetic. Austen takes not only at the environmental devastation caused by the large chemical corporations (there is a city on the banks of the St. Lawrence that has been turned into Freaktown because of a chemical spill), but she also takes aim at our current education system and the whole idea of streaming our children. These aspects might be exaggerated in All Good Children but they are still very identifiable.

My only quibble with the book would be the abrupt ending. Austen slowly grows the tension until the reader is vibrating with it, but then never tones it down. I would have liked a slower descent to match the slow ascent.

Still, an excellent read for those who liked the Hunger Games, Matched, The Maze Runner, and well, all the other dystopian lit out there. It also won the Sunburst prize for speculative fiction as well as the CLA award for Young Adult fiction, just in case you need a gold sticker on the cover to appreciate a book.
