



# Death and Douglas

*J.W. Ocker*

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Douglas has grown up around the business of death. Generations of his family have run the Mortimer Family Funeral Home. The mortician and gravediggers are all his buddies. And the display room of caskets is an awesome place for hide and seek. It's business as usual in Douglas's small New England town. Until one day an incredibly out of the ordinary murder victim is brought to the funeral home. And more startling: others follow. On the cusp of Halloween, a serial killer has arrived. And unsatisfied with the small-town investigation, Douglas enlists his friends to help him solve the mystery. With sumptuous descriptions of a bucolic town and it's quirky people, fascinating yet middle grade-appropriate insider information about the funeral process, and a crackling mystery with a heart-pounding conclusion?Death and Douglas has something for readers young and old.

## Death and Douglas Details

Date : Published 2017 by Sky Pony Press

ISBN :

Author : J.W. Ocker

Format : Hardcover 362 pages

Genre : Childrens, Middle Grade, Mystery, Holiday, Halloween, Horror, Young Adult, Death

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## From Reader Review Death and Douglas for online ebook

### Lisa Pett says

This is a pretty thoughtful book for a middle-grade murder mystery. But it works. Douglas Mortimer is a self-possessed ten year old with a lot of experience with death. At least death by natural causes. But when a murder victim, then another, then another, ends up in his family's funeral home business, the small, Northeastern town of Cowlmouth is thrown into fear and chaos.

With Halloween fast approaching and the local police unable to find the killer, it's up to Douglas and his friends to solve the crime before they end up as the next victim.

It has some exciting, frightening moments but is punctuated by good conversations about life and death between Douglas and his father.

The dialog is modern but not snappy and the ending is less satisfying than I would have liked but I overall enjoyed it and would recommend it for 4th through 8th graders who enjoy a good scary story.

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### Shellie Taylor says

This was such a cute book. I loved the main character's best friend, Lowell. Definitely my favorite character. This story was fun and innocent with a subtext of a serious conversation about death and a child's perception of it. I enjoyed the message the book sent; that death is normal and that life isn't about how or when we die, but how we live. This book had suspense and mystery mixed with heartwarming comedy and dark humor.

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### Devann says

*I received a free copy of this book from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review*

This was a fun book and I think it had a great message that it's okay for kids to be curious about death and that people should be more comfortable with death and normalize it because it's something that's going to happen to everyone. There were a lot of great parts with Douglas and his parents where they would talk about death and the murders that were happening and how Douglas was trying to deal with it and reconcile the kind of 'peaceful' death he's been used to up to this point with these violent deaths that are happening now. While the other part of the plot was a fun little murder mystery, I did feel like it was a bit lacking in depth and that the resolution was very abrupt and maybe a tad unbelievable at the end. But overall it was an enjoyable read and I think a kid would probably enjoy it a bit more than I did, since it is after all aimed at them.

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### Mike says

I've been a big fan of Ocker through his blog and his travel books for years, so when I heard that he had

written a middle-grade book involving serial killers, mortuaries, and corpse desecration, I was understandably...curious. This book definitely will not disappoint Ocker fans, with its exceedingly morbid subject matter and characteristically evocative descriptions of New England autumns, county fairs, and the like. As for whether the book is appropriate for its stated target audience of "8 to 13"...I don't know about 8, but I distinctly remember being absolutely obsessed with Stephen King by the time I was 12 (while other classmates were desperately sharing V.C. Andrews books under the table like so much pre-teen crack cocaine). This would be an ideal book for kids-of-a-certain-disposition. Everyone knows (or was?) a kid like that.

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### **Brittany says**

Douglas Mortimer is a 12 year old miniature funeral home director. He lives in a funeral home, wears suits, and hangs out in the local cemetery. He is good at dealing with all the death he is exposed to until a murderer comes to town. Death by murder is a bit different than the usual clientele his family serves and then the murderer comes after him! It's up to Douglas, the police chief's son, and the EMT's daughter to combine forces to become a Scooby Doo gang and unmask the villain. What's my take on all this? I loved it. Mind you, I really like this local New England author and have given his other books 5 star ratings too. This was the first book I bought in a long time (I prefer the library), but I had a feeling this might be put in my annual Halloween readings (along with the Halloween Tree which this has elements of). There were some things I would change like there is a big jump in time to Halloween night, there could have been more buildup of suspects, and the ending wasn't ideal for me, but it will still give you all the Halloween feels with some great descriptors. Great book for kids and adult into these kinds of stories.

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### **Jaina Rose says**

This review is also available on my blog, [Read Till Dawn](#).

What a perfect book this would have been to read right before Halloween! It's spooky and scary, with a serial killer on the loose and a main character who spends his life surrounded by death, but never so gruesome that it would be unpleasant to read.

It's perfect for middle school, really—though I liked it too, and I'm definitely not in that demographic anymore. I thought Ocker took a really interesting angle on spooky stories, telling a tale that was no less believable than an episode of *NCIS* or *Monk* or [insert your favorite crime show here]. Douglas is very comfortable with death, the sort of death that happens by accident or through aging. He knows and accepts that it is natural and inevitable, and he has a very intimate understanding of the process that occurs—from home removal to embalming to funeral ceremony to burial—because he has grown up as a part of the funeral business. When he discovers a serial killer is on the loose, though, it's fascinating not only to watch him and his friends do their best to solve the mystery but also to watch him grapple to equate his peaceful understanding of death with the horrible, unnatural, untimely death that occurs when there is a murder.

I think this is an important issue to think about, especially in a culture such as ours that is so inundated with books and movies and TV shows that revolve around solving murders. I love Agatha Christie's stories, for example, but none of her characters ever quite grapple with the horribleness of murder in quite the same way Douglas does. I think that's a big advantage of having a kid narrate, and I think it's also part of what makes

the book both accessible for younger kids and also possibly a bit too much for them.

After all, dealing with the finality and purpose of death is pretty heady stuff for a kid's book. It manages to do a good job, I think, even without bringing in any sort of discussion of an afterlife. And the characters, both major and minor, are just so well-done that the entire book is a joy to read. It's also surprisingly hilarious for a book that literally has the word "Death" in its title.

Basically, if you want to read it, then do. I highly recommend it. But if you (or the kid you're thinking about) might not feel ready, then set it aside for now. Either way, think about saving it to read on some dark nights in October leading up to Halloween—that's definitely the best time of year for it!

Disclaimer: I received a complimentary copy of this novel from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Emilie says**

Death and Douglas is about a 12 year old boy named Douglas and his two friends, Audrey and Lowell, who after a serial killer starts murdering people in their small town, decide to investigate the murders. Douglas also happens to be the only child of the town's two morticians, giving him an interesting take on death.

I enjoyed this book. It was just the right amount of creepy, considering it is meant for kids, but it does definitely make you a little nervous. I liked the writing of this book. At times, Douglas did seem a bit older than twelve, but much of that can be attributed to his upbringing, so I didn't really mind it.

I also liked that these kids didn't find out who the murderer was by figuring out clues and solving anything. They were wrong the whole time about what the murderer wanted. They didn't know anything until the murderer came after them and they had to defend themselves. I likes not being able to solve this book's mystery, since there wasn't really a way to do that. Any one you would likely think of as the murderer is wrong and there was no real way to guess who it was.

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### **Dayle (the literary llama) says**

QUICK NOTES: I don't tend to read a lot of Middle Grade books, there just aren't that many that grab my attention long enough for me to read them. Although I'm always ecstatic to find new books to get for nieces, nephews, and friends to read, so I'm always on the lookout for new books to pass along. Something about DEATH AND DOUGLAS called for me to read it though, probably the macabre setting of the story, it spoke to the child within. And I'm so glad I did because I really liked it.

The book is everything that the synopsis promises; quirky characters, funeral home settings, murder and mystery, all swirling around a spooky town during Halloween. Douglas and his friends were so much fun to follow around and get into mischief with. Equal parts clue hunting and bad luck, with some action sequences thrown in for good measure. A very easy book for me to recommend to a multitude of ages! Ocker can definitely spin a good tale.

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

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## **Hoover Public Library Kids and Teens says**

Douglas lives in a funeral home. Death is no big deal to him. Until a serial killer shows up in his town.

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## **Kathy says**

I'm rating this book as a 12-year-old me would. As an adult who is in the funeral business, I think this is a great way to introduce young adults to what goes on in a funeral home. Sure, there are incongruities (and one instance in which the word "carcass" is used as synonymous with dead body), but by and large this story is a fair depiction of what it would be like to grow up in a funeral home and be aware of death from such an early age. Aside from that, the story is also a great adventure mystery!

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## **Cindy Mitchell \*Kiss the Book\* says**

Ocker, J.W. *Death and Douglas*, 362 pages. Sky Pony Press, 2017. \$17. Language: G (0 swears); Mature Content: PG; Violence PG.

For twelve-year-old Douglas Mortimer, death has been a way of life. He practically sleeps with the dead since he lives in the Mortimer Family Funeral Home his parents run. Douglas has always thought that death was natural and normal. He knows how to deal with death. Until he doesn't. Until the day when bodies start showing up with a letter carved in their cheeks. Suddenly Douglas has to face a different kind of death and he's not sure he's up to it. He and his friends decide to secretly investigate the murders, which starts out almost as a game, but gets progressively more frightening, especially to Douglas.

The writing style and New England town in the fall are reminiscent of Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. I loved the descriptive writing, though it may offer a mild challenge for elementary readers. The story is divided into days of the week, which makes it cool, especially with the plot arc. I thought the depiction of growing up and being surrounded by death was done in a sensitive manner and it is refreshing to have parents who are alive and intelligent in a young adult novel.

EL, MS - ADVISABLE. Michelle in the Middle  
<https://kissthebook.blogspot.com/2018...>

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## **Zanereads says**

Douglas is 12 years old. His playground is a local cemetery and he lives above the Mortimer Funeral Home. Douglas comes from a long line of morticians and he's pretty sure he knows all there is to know about death, until murders start happening in his town. Douglas and his two best friends dub themselves the "Ghastlies" and take to patrolling the town. Between the three of them, they have a lot of inside information. Douglas lives in the funeral home, all the victims are coming right through his front door. Lowell, is the son of the

Police Chief and listens in to confidential conversations and Audrey's dad is an EMT first responder so she gets the dirty details quick. It's their mission to figure out who the killer is and why he's doing what he's doing.

This book was just great from start to finish. It kept pulling me through from chapter to chapter and I had no idea what was happening until it happened. It kept me guessing. It kept throwing me off the track, and in the end, I was accidentally out smart by some middle schoolers, because they figured it out before I did.

Over all, I have no complaints. At all. I loved it all. Every character and every scene. I especially loved the spooky funeral home, cemetery thing it had going on, not to mention all of Douglas' weird quirks. On top of all of this, it still managed to get in some real talk about life and death. 5 Stars!

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### **Kellee says**

To be honest, I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I started this book because it is way creepier than I thought it was going to be, but a serial killer on the loose in a town definitely will add that creep factor to any book.

Douglas is definitely well-rounded and mature when it comes to death, it has been around him his entire life, but all death he's encountered has been natural or an accident until now. This is an interesting point of view for a character as I've never read a middle grade book with a character like Douglas. All of a sudden, a young boy who never feared death realizes that there is evil in some deaths and that scares him more than it may scare most because it is a new realization. This definitely adds to the suspense because Douglas is not only questioning everything around him but also on the look out for a serial killer, so all bumps in the night are a reason to jump.

I will also say that the conclusion was not what I saw coming!

Side note: Douglas and his friends did some DANGEROUS things, and I know that we have to suspend our belief when reading, but the whole time as an adult I wanted to yell at them for being so ridiculously careless in their safety by searching for a serial killer! Kids: Do not do that at home!

Full review with teaching tools: <http://www.unleashingreaders.com/?p=1...>

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### **Dea Berlinda says**

The first time I saw it, I just couldn't resist the book cover. Jumping into the story, this book pretty much reminds me of *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaimann. The main character named Nobody Owens was 14 at that time while in this book, Douglas Mortimer was 12. These boys had grown up around cemetery environment even though they had different skill (Bod what's with ghosts or spirits' gift and Douglas with funeral requirements aptitude). But I think they both have the same curiosity, bravery, innocence, empathy, and strong will.

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## **Mark Buxton says**

My name is Douglas, and I've lived with death all of my life; my parents own a funeral home. However, my thoughts about dying have drastically changed since the monster struck for the first time. The victims of the serial killer have had letters cut into their cheeks, apparently to show the days of the week they were killed. My best friend Lowell and I are determined to discover the identity of the Day Killer; kids are easily able to listen in on conversations and sneak around the town collecting clues. I didn't expect to become the target of the murderer. I haven't gotten a good look, but I know someone has been hiding in the shadows, waiting to get me. My dad says I know more about death than other kids, probably more than most adults. I hope Lowell and I can help the police catch the serial killer before I become his next victim.

I've got to admit that I thought a middle grade book with a focus on death and a graveyard had to be in the fantasy genre. Nope. As I've described above, the plot's all about the kids searching for the murderer stalking the town, and Douglas trying to understand this new type of death. He's grown up understanding that death is a natural part of life, but murder is unnatural. He also tries to understand how his family's business fits into death and grieving, and he wonders about his own feelings. Does he want to go into funeral services when he grows up? These questions seem to be the actual focus of the book, as there are some questions left unanswered. The killer's no longer a problem in the end, but the author chooses to not reveal much about his identity or past. The character had no identification on him, and no one knew for sure why he committed the crimes. Also, there were two women who expressed concern about Douglas's living situation; they felt it wasn't healthy for him to grow up around death every day. They hinted that they might contact children's services, but nothing ever came of it. Douglas and his dad seemed to come to the conclusion that Douglas was okay, but there wasn't any information that the women had accepted it. There was an indication on the book's cover that this it included humor, but I didn't find much of it.

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