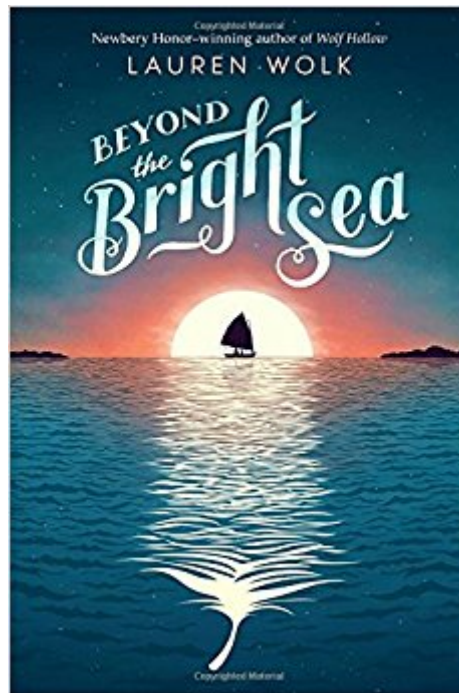




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# Beyond The Bright Sea



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *A Newbery Honor* award-winning *A Wolf Hollow*, the moving story of an orphan, determined to know her own history, who discovers the true meaning of family. “The sight of a campfire on a distant island proves the catalyst for a series of discoveries and events—some poignant, some frightening—that Ms. Wolk unfolds with uncommon grace. *The Wall Street Journal* | “Crow is a determined and dynamic heroine with a strong intuition, who pieces together the puzzle of her past while making profound realizations about the definition of family. *Publishers Weekly*, starred review | “Beautiful, evocative. *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review Twelve-year-old Crow has lived her entire life on a tiny, isolated piece of the starkly beautiful Elizabeth Islands in Massachusetts. Abandoned and set adrift in a small boat when she was just hours old, Crow’s only companions are Osh, the man who rescued and raised her, and Miss Maggie, their fierce and affectionate neighbor across the sandbar. Crow has always been curious about the world around her, but it isn’t until the night a mysterious fire appears across the water that the unspoken question of her own history forms in her heart. Soon, an unstoppable chain of events is triggered, leading Crow down a path of discovery and danger. Vivid and heart-wrenching, Lauren Wolk’s *Beyond the Bright Sea* is a gorgeously crafted and tensely paced tale that explores questions of identity, belonging, and the true meaning of family.

## Book Information

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Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Girls & Women

Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

Wolk | "Creating mystery and suspense in an unusual setting, Newbery Honor winner Wolk spins an intriguing tale of an orphan determined to find her roots, set in the 1920s. Crow is a determined and dynamic heroine with a strong intuition, who pieces together the puzzle of her past while making profound realizations about the definition of family." Publishers Weekly, starred review "Every chapter in the book has a new mystery to be solved: why was Crow sent away in an old boat when she was a baby? Why is a fire burning on an abandoned island? Did Capt. Kidd really hide treasure nearby?... The mysteries and the words that describe them are compelling enough to send readers to the islands for years to come. A beautiful, evocative sophomore effort from Newbery honoree Wolk." Kirkus, starred review Praise for Lauren Wolk's Newbery Honor winning debut, *Wolf Hollow*: "The honesty of *Wolf Hollow* will just about shred your heart, but Annabelle's courage and compassion will restore it to you, fuller than before. This book matters." Sara Pennypacker, New York Times bestselling author of *Pax* "An evocative setting, memorable characters, a searing story: *Wolf Hollow* has stayed with me long after I closed the book. It has the feel of an instant classic." Linda Sue Park, Newbery Medalist and New York Times bestselling author "Wrenching and true. . . comparisons to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* will abound. But Wolk gives us her own story—one full of grace and stark, brutal beauty." The New York Times Book Review "This exquisite debut confronts injustice and doesn't flinch." People "[A] powerful debut . . . beautifully written." The Wall Street Journal "Trusting its readers implicitly with its moral complexity, *Wolf Hollow*'s novel stuns." Kirkus, starred review "The narrative is powerful, complex, and lifelike . . . a truly moving debut." School Library Journal, starred review "Wolk movingly expresses Annabelle's loss of innocence through the honest, clear voice of her protagonist." Publishers Weekly, starred review "Perfectly pitched to be used in classrooms in conjunction with *To Kill a Mockingbird*." Booklist,

starred review | "The tension builds and never lets up." •The Horn Book, starred review

Lauren Wolk is an award-winning poet and author of the bestselling Newbery Honor-winning *Wolf Hollow*, described by the *New York Times Book Review* as "full of grace and stark, brutal beauty." She was born in Baltimore and has since lived in California, Rhode Island, Minnesota, Canada, and Ohio. She now lives with her family on Cape Cod.

Lauren Wolk is a terrific writer. As good or better than *Wolf Hollow*. I recommend her books highly, both for young adult and for adults.

The author of *Wolf Hollow* returns with her second novel for young people. This is a novel of the Elizabeth Islands in Massachusetts where Crow has lived all of her life. She lives on a solitary island with Osh, the man who found her afloat in a little boat when she was a newborn baby. The others on the islands won't associate with Crow, since they all assume that she came from a nearby island that was a leper hospital. Miss Maggie is the exception, she cares fiercely for Crow and makes sure that she learns what she needs to despite not being able to attend school. As Crow starts to piece together her own history, she exposes those she loves to new dangers that are far worse than the storms of nature they weather together. Wolk once again has created a novel that brings a place to life. Here she has chosen the Elizabeth Islands and the islands themselves feature prominently in the story both in terms of their isolation but also in their beauty. The islands serve as shelter, home, a source of fuel and food, and a community as well. The island with the hospital for lepers insures that Crow is even more isolated than the rest of the community due to the questions of her past. It's a brilliant setting, one of the best that I have ever read where each page is a reflection of the sea and the islands. Crow is a dazzlingly great heroine. She is strong and independent, determined to figure things out even as those around her give up. She pieces together clues from the mystery of her past, a mystery that permeates the entire novel even after it is solved. Crow is anxious to learn of her history and throughout the novel explores questions of identity and family of love and betrayal. It's a novel that swirls and eddies, displaying beauty and dangers in turn. This is a beautifully written and deep novel for middle grade readers who will long to visit Crow's island themselves. Appropriate for ages 9-12.

No author gets a free pass. Your last book have been a spot-on bit of brilliance, lighting up the literary landscape like a thousand Roman candles. Pfui. A writer is only as good as their latest book, as any jaded 10-year-old will tell you. And while I greatly enjoyed Lauren Wolk's debut novel (and Newbery Honor winner) *Wolf Hollow*, I also knew full well that the author originally intended that book to be a written work for adults.

*Beyond the Bright Sea*, her next novel, is written specifically with a child audience in mind from the start. Would that change Wolk's writing style at all? Could she maintain the same level of written sophistication if she knew the book was going to be read by young people, or would she veer off into the dreaded trying-too-hard territory known by too many authors all too well? Heck, would she even respect her audience or would she be writing down to them? In retrospect, I suspect that it didn't matter much how I felt about the book walking into it. If I had had high expectations, they would have been met. Low ones were simply exceeded. *Beyond the Bright Sea* is a slower, statelier novel than a lot of books out there, but once it reaches its full speed there's no holding it back. Leprosy, pirate gold, orphans, shipwrecks, lost messages, they all crowd the pages and leave you coming back for more. Wolk actually knows how to write for kids, and not just that, write beautifully. The proof is in the pudding. Crow says it was seeing that light on Penikese Island that started it all, but I don't know if you'd agree. Maybe the real beginning was when Osh found her as a baby, washed up on the shore in a makeshift boat. Clearly her boat came from Penikese where the leprosy sanitarium was located. He could have turned her in to the proper authorities, but for a man escaping a past he'd never discuss, it was actually easier to raise her with the help of his neighbor Miss Maggie. Now Crow is older and she wants to know where she came from. Who her parents were. What she doesn't know is that delving deep into the mystery will reveal a lot more than her family. There's a man out there who thinks she has what he wants, and if Crow isn't careful she'll lose everything she has in pursuit of what she wants. I certainly wouldn't peg the book as a straight-up mystery, but after Chapter 10 that feeling does begin to pervade the pages. And if it is a mystery then Wolk is playing fair. She gives the kids all the clues they need, and no doubt some of them will solve some of the origins of Crow's birth on their own. Wolk fills the book with mysterious happenings that are within a child's grasp, and that goes double for the foreshadowing. Now I like to compare foreshadowing to spice. Some authors think the more you have, the better, and they'll laden their chapters down with it so much that by the

time the big event actually arrives it's anti-climatic. Wolk is different. It isn't that she uses less foreshadowing, she just parcels it out better. For example, a mention in the first chapter of the boat Crow arrived in and that Osh burned in the first makes her wonder why THAT particular wood got burnt. And yes, many is the chapter that ends with a breath of things to come, but they do what they are designed to do. They pull you further in. In terms of character development, Wolk outdoes herself. We spend a long time with Osh, getting to know him as an outsider would, before Miss Maggie tells us a story that essentially reduces his personality down to its most perfect form. It's the story of meeting a man who, when starving, would cut only a single arm off of the starfishes he caught for starfish soup. His logic was that he would live and they would live. A WWI survivor (we're never certain about the degree of his involvement, but there are some distinct moments of PTSD) he bears not a little similarity to another haunted war survivor in Wolk's books. Toby, the shell-shocked man in "Wolf Hollow" was far more damaged than Osh, but maybe if he'd found a way to cut himself off from the wider world (as Osh does) and care for someone, he would have thrived. Curiously, while we get great swaths of story with Osh, we know almost nothing about the other adult in Crow's life, Miss Maggie. Why does she live alone? What was her life like once? And in true keeping with a child's perspective regarding the adults around her, we never get a clear sense of Maggie and Osh's ages. Some mysteries are not meant to be solved. If Osh and Toby share similarities, what are we to make of Wolk's latest villain? After reading "Wolf Hollow" I was struck by a single, piercing thought. The character of Betty in that book is, without a doubt, the most chilling psychopath I've ever encountered in a tale for kids. And for a while there it seemed as though "Beyond the Bright Sea" didn't have a baddie at all. When at last you do meet him, you don't realize him for what he is (or the threat he represents) at first. It's only when you get to know him better that you realize he's actually the polar opposite of Betty. While she was a cunning little girl, able to use society's expectations to her advantage, the man in this book is dumb as a box of rocks. By the internal logic of children's literature itself that should make him less of a threat. Dumb villains are easy to outsmart and therefore pose no real harm, right? But it's quite the opposite here. And as it happens he does share one particular quality with our dear Betty: He's unpredictable. And unpredictability, as anyone can tell you, can get you killed. Now Wolk's the kind of writer where you

feel this strange palpable sense of relief, if you're a children's librarian, delving into her book for the first time. Relief, that is, that she's such an excellent writer. The kind of writer that makes you want to quote lines from her book out of context. That's always my instinct, and why not? Here are some choice examples that I particularly enjoyed: "feeling hurt and being hurt aren't always the same thing." (Re: leprosy) "What you do is who you are." "So that we writ in stone. The rest in water." "there are better bonds than blood." But would a kid actually want to read it? Well, that's sort of a trick question, isn't it? As any children's librarian worth their salt knows, you can get a kid to read anything if you sell it to them correctly. A co-worker pointed out to me recently that the first chapter or so is relatively slow, compared to the rest of the book. That's a bit unfortunate. Slow passages are fine, particularly if they are of a literary bent, but you wouldn't usually kick off your book with them right from the start. Still, once the plot gets moving you're in for a heck of a ride. There is true villainy and true love on these pages. There's the mystery of adults who have learned too much and the foolishness of children who only want to learn more. A kid reading this book will read it on one level, an adult on another, and history clearer still. A bright, beautiful read. For ages 10-14.

I was looking for a book I could read with my daughter so I started reading the few pages available then bought the eBook so I could keep reading it while the print was being delivered. I spent half my life on Mount Desert Island and this book brought it all back. I've so enjoyed the pace of the book and the little surprises dropped along the way. Very enjoyable.

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