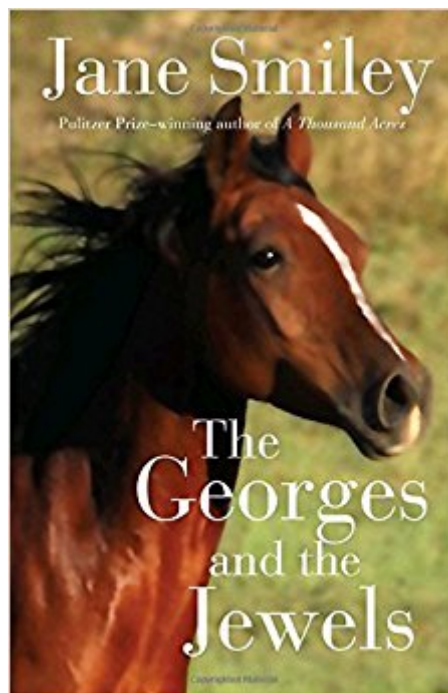




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# **The Georges And The Jewels: Book One Of The Horses Of Oak Valley Ranch**



## Synopsis

A Pulitzer Prize winner makes her debut for young readers. Abby Lovitt has been riding horses for as long as she can remember, but Daddy hasn't let her name a single one. He calls all their geldings George and their mares Jewel and warns her not to get attached. The horses are there on the ranch to be sold, plain and simple. But with all the stress at school (the Big Four—Linda, Mary A., Mary N., Joan—have turned against her) and home (nothing feels right with her brother, Danny, gone), Abby can't help but seek comfort in the Georges and the Jewels, who greet her every day with soft nickers. Except for one: the horse who won't meet her gaze, the horse who bucks her off, the horse Daddy insists she ride and train. Abby knows not to cross her father, but she knows, too, that she can't get back on Ornerly George. And suddenly the horses seem like no refuge at all. From Pulitzer Prize winner Jane Smiley comes an emotionally charged and action-filled novel for young readers, set in the vibrant landscape of 1960s California horse country.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 5—8 • A quiet novel about the relationships surrounding 12-year-old Abby on her family's rural horse ranch in 1960s California. Due to her parents' strict religious views (no TV or rock music), Abby often feels like an outcast in her small seventh-grade class and she is often subjected to ridicule by the popular girls. She finds solace in working with the horses (there are numerous detailed scenes of riding, jumping, and grooming) with the exception of Ornerly George. To avoid attachment and to ready the animals for sale, her father names all their horses George or

Jewel. Meanwhile, the family is dealing with the estrangement of 16-year-old Danny, who left home after an argument. Abby's voice tends to be far more intuitive and insightful than one would expect of her age, especially as she discerns the nuances and tensions in her parents' relationship. The occasional anachronistic word or phrase such as "wandering around the strip mall" (a term generally not in use until the 1980s) tend to distract. Ultimately, the subtle shifts in attitude that occur may be appreciated by adults but lost on the young readers for whom the book is intended. Intricate pen-and-ink drawings of horse equipment at the beginning of each chapter give the book an old-fashioned feel. --Madeline J. Bryant, Los Angeles Public Library END --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review, Publishers Weekly, July 20, 2009:"A lyrical meditation on horses, families, and the vicissitudes of peer relationships among girls."Review, Booklist, September 15, 2009:"[A] quiet, psychologically attuned youth debut."Review, The Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY), October 3, 2009:"The Georges and the Jewels' is filled with fascinating details about the care and training of horses, and Abby is a refreshing heroine in today's snark-filled times."Review, Chicago Sun-Times, October 18, 2009:"Smiley's intricate and sophisticated knowledge of horses shines throughout this book, making it a guaranteed winner for horse-loving youngsters."Review, LATimes.com, September 27, 2009:"I have never admired [Smiley's] writing as much as I do in the first of what promises to be a series of books for children...'The Georges and the Jewels' can easily take its place on the shelf along with the great horse stories of childhood."Review, The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, October 2009:"Readers...will be happy to mount up and ride along."From the Hardcover edition.

The Georges and the Jewels by Jane Smiley is another of my "Love it!" book for horsey readers of all ages. The title refers to the horses on the Lovitt farm - all the geldings are called George and the mares, Jewel. Abby's father insists this so that they don't become attached since all the horses are for sale. The 7th grader has her share of problems from difficult horses to ride to social interaction with her peers. She finds solace in the "good" horses, especially a new foal, she names Jack despite her father's rule. With help from a gentle horse trainer, she learns important life lessons about horses and people alike. I look forward to reading the sequel about Jack growing up!

This is the kind of horse novel I've been looking for, one that is actually about horses and is not a soap opera set in a barn. The central story here is about a 12-year-old girl who is trying to cope with

an uncooperative horse called Ornery George. She is expected to help her father train him so that he can be sold at a profit, but the horse keeps bucking her off. While she's perfectly comfortable with the other horses at her dad's barn, she's scared of Ornery George, and for good reason. There are a number of other threads woven into this one. Her parents are born-again Christians, which creates some complications in her life. I like that her religious family is portrayed neither as positive nor negative. Her father is sometimes kind and sometimes unreasonable. She seems to like her church reasonably well, but her family's restrictions cause her problems with school and friends. School is another sub-thread. She's in the 7th grade and struggling with a girl who seems to be out to "steal" her best friend, and also a clique of four other girls which she tries simply to avoid. Mean girls are a staple of this genre, but these girls are more complex. There is no over-the-top villain, just a group of girls jockeying for status, sometimes in unsavory ways. Three different trainers help the heroine out with Ornery George, and only one of them is able to make any progress with him. The training methods are presented without judgement. It's not a case of evil trainer vs. good trainer, but more a case of trying out different methods and learning a method that works for this horse.

Though I'm an adult, I responded to Smiley's wonderful writing and knowledge of horses. Her sense of place - the telling details - makes you feel as though you are living at the ranch, with the vivid characters, both animal and human. Horse people will find the training methods interesting. (I liked the contrast between the way Abby's Uncle Luke and Jem (a trainer) worked with a difficult horse, Ornery George.) I also liked Jem's telling Abby the stories that detailed how "if you have a real feeling in your mind of what you want the horse to do, your own body will communicate to the horse how to do it." The longer I ride, the more I discover that the rider's intention is so important. The main character, Abby, is easy to like and someone you want to succeed.

This is one of the best books I have ever read! The author paints a picture in the reader's mind throughout the entire book! I really enjoyed the twist of Abby's life at school with her peers and then her life at home with the horses. I would definitely recommend this book to horse lovers and non horse lovers alike! I can't wait to start Jane Smiley's next book: *A Good Horse*. I'm in "horse heaven" without a doubt when reading this novel about a girl who loves horses!

I liked the original take on "twelve-year-old girl with horse." In this case, the girl has several horses, and figuring out what works for one isn't the same as figuring out what works for all. The heroine is

delightful, resourceful, and frequently in over her head: a great trifecta. I'm not a big reader of horse and girl books, but I'll go back for more with this series. Stellar writing, too, with interior monologues that ring dead true.

I like but don't love this series of books. They were recommended by a friend because I'm into natural horsemanship, but I didn't feel that they represented the topic all that well. It sort of implied that a couple of "tricks" would fix almost any horse in no time. Still, for the youth audience, they are nice books and good reading.

The Georges and the Jewels is a slow paced uneventful story of a pre-teen, Abbey, growing up on a ranch with loving parents who are much more old fashioned than the upwardly mobile suburban parents of her classmates. The story lightly deals with mean girl cliques, horse training cruelty and religious intolerance, but so superficially, it's disappointing. Considering the author is Jane Smiley, I expected more deeply developed characters and conflict. That said, girls who are nuts about horses will enjoy this story and probably the sequels.

the first of the series. I read the rest of them as well, as they were recommended to me, and I liked them better and better as the series progressed.

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