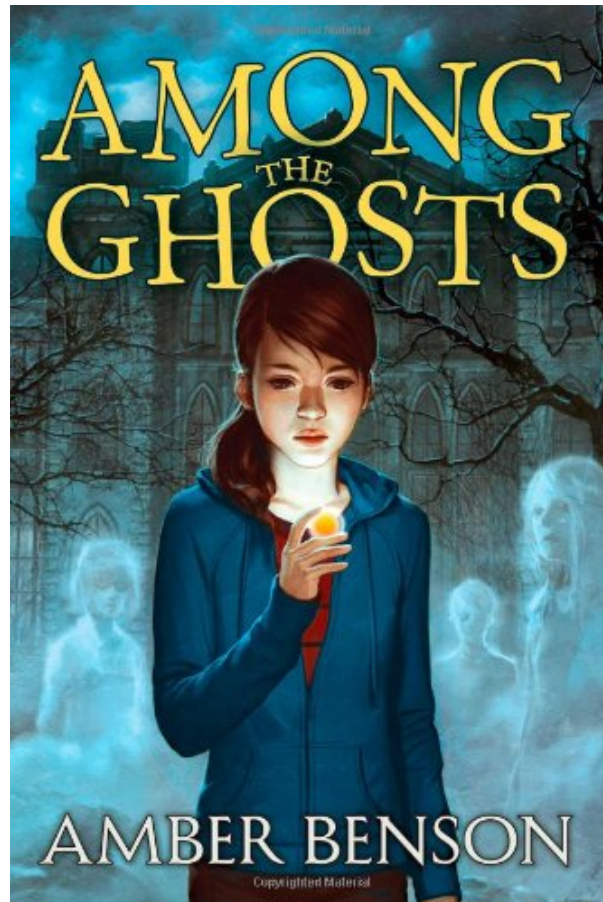
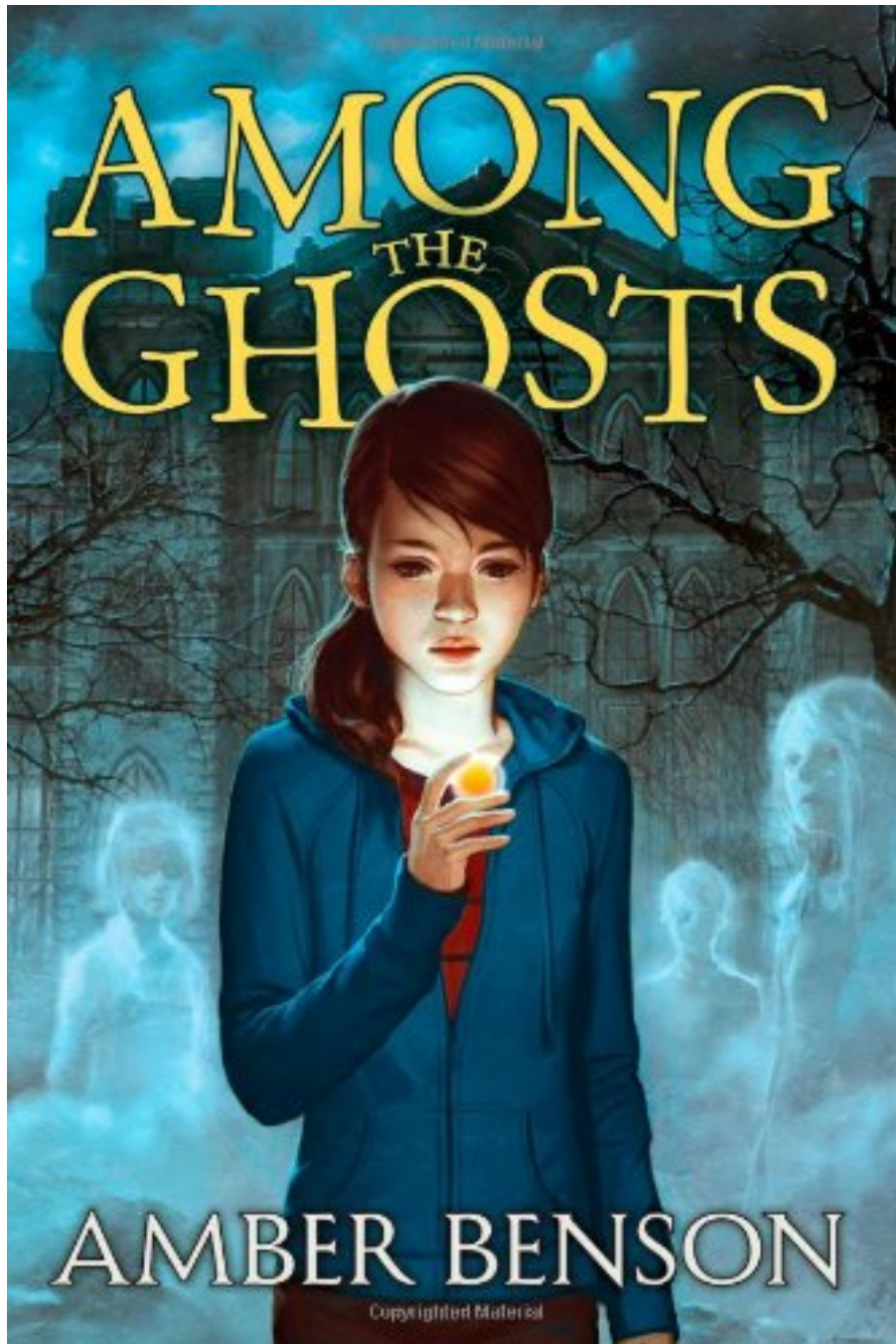


# AMONG THE GHOSTS BY AMBER BENSON



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From Booklist

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Noh, a slightly eccentric girl whose father is constantly traveling, moves in with her aunt, a teacher at the gothic New Newbridge Academy. The Academy has a strange, storied history but Noh feels right at home there. She's startled to meet several other kids while investigating an old, burned-out dormitory on the far end of campus, especially since the teachers keep telling her that no students reside at the school during the summer. Soon, Noh discovers that these other students are actually ghosts and that she's the only "realie" who can see them . . . and, when the ghosts start disappearing, the only one who can save them!

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It's all about perspective..

By Theresa

Spending the summer at school is a dreadful thought for most kids, but Noleen-Anne (Noh for short) sees the opportunity as an adventure. Noh is sent to stay with her aunt, a teacher at the New Newbridge Academy, while her father heads to the Appalachians. The first stop for the young explorer is a nearby cemetery where she has a strange encounter with an old woman. The woman actually throws a stone at the young girl. Under ordinary circumstances, having a rock tossed at you would be an upsetting event, but Noh is no ordinary girl. There is an evil eye carved on the stone and, instead of being afraid, Noh decides the carving is a good luck charm and keeps it in her pocket. Her exploration of the Academy reveals a series of mysterious events involving disappearing ghosts, marching ants, floating white balls and paths that always end at the beginning no matter which direction you take to reach the other side. She is determined to solve the puzzle and enlists the help of a former student who is more stunned that Noh is a "realie" than Noh is in discovering, with the aid of the evil eye stone, her ability to see and speak with ghosts.

This is a quick paced adventure with fully developed characters and a well thought out plot. Lessons in bravery, social interaction and perspective are told without being preachy or bogging down the narrative flow. There are short "intermissions" if you will, from a malevolent entity throughout the tale that, while initially seemed jarring, ultimately added a layer of suspense and creepiness to the story. Although it's been a long while since reading books for this age group, (I'm currently surrounded by kids under 5,) *AMONG THE GHOSTS* reminds me of the fantastic *GOOSEBUMPS* series by R.L. Stine.

I would also like to mention the amazing illustrations throughout the book by Sina Grace. The black and white drawings add a nice visual layer to the story. I especially like the sketch of Noh in the cemetery. You really get a sense of the serenity Noh feels being among the ghosts. It's also worth noting, for YA readers above this age group, there is a connection between Noh and the New Newbridge Academy with the author's *Calliope-Reaper Jones* series. Hopefully, the adventures of Noh and her ghostly pals will continue. I'm interested in finding out what happens when the "realies" come back to school.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

OK Idea, Somewhat Disappointing Execution

By Mary Kate

12-year-old Noh was supposed to spend the summer in the Appalachian Mountains with her father but, at the last minute, he instead sends her off to stay with his sister, Clara. Demonstrating his complete irresponsibility as a parent and human being, he neglected to contact his sister before shipping his daughter off to stay with her and, when Noh arrives at Clara's house, she discovers that her aunt and cousins have gone to the beach for the summer. Not knowing what beach they went to and figuring her father cannot be reached (no cell

phones in this story) Noh takes the night train to Newbridge, where her Aunt Sarah works as a teacher of English literature at a local school, New Newbridge Academy. As she walks from the train station to the school, Noh cuts through a cemetery where an old woman suddenly appears, screams at her, throws a rock at her and just as quickly disappears. Noh picks the stone up, likes the "evil eye" carving on it and tucks it into her pocket. The stone, it seems, enhances the special powers Noh has always unknowingly had. Once she arrives at the gothic boarding school, New Newbridge Academy, Noh discovers that she has the ability to see and communicate with ghosts.

As a set up, it's not bad - not particularly original, but with possibilities. Unfortunately, author Amber Benson never quite tapped into those possibilities and, as a result, failed to draw me fully into the story.

For me, the biggest problem was the characterizations. Aside from Noh, who was fleshed out to some extent (but who often seemed much younger than her age), none had any depth to speak of, nor were they particularly interesting. Some, in fact, seemed to have no reason to even be in the story, since they contributed nothing. Others appeared, said a few words and were never seen or heard from again. Still others verged on caricature, rather like the oddball characters found in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, but sadly without the quirkiness, cleverness and humor Snicket gave his creations. Mostly though, the characters didn't feel like actual people and that made it more difficult for me to care about them.

In addition, some plot points were never explained, others poorly so. Even if *Among the Ghosts* turns out to be the first in a series (which seems to be suggested by some of the occurrences in the closing scenes), I was left with questions that I felt should have been answered in this volume.

*Among the Ghosts* was the first book by Amber Benson that I've read. While it didn't turn out to be my cup of tea, her *Calliope Reaper-Jones* series sounds like it might be worth a look. I plan to check it out.

Notes: Cover art by the wonderfully talented Jason Chan and interior illustrations by Sina Grace.

Other ghost-y type books that are aimed at about the same age group as *Among the Ghosts*:

*Suddenly Supernatural: School Spirit* (first in a series) by Elizabeth Cody Kimmel

*Theodosia and the Serpents of Chaos* (first in a series) by R.L LaFevers

*The Haunting* by Margaret Mahy

*The Witches of Worm* by Zilpha Keatley Snyder

*The Secret Life of Sparrow Delaney* by Suzanne Harper (slightly older target age)

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Welcome to a Truly Enchanting World

By Alex C. Telander

Amber Benson takes a break from *Calliope Reaper-Jones* and tells an enchanting little story for the younger folk. In the style of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and *Graveyard Book*, Benson creates a unique world of fun characters in a very interesting place, with just enough scariness to keep young readers on the edge of their seats.

Noleen-Anne Harris Morgan Maypothor, better known as Noh, is a strange little girl who likes her time to herself; her inquisitive and investigative nature makes her wiser beyond her years, and it seems like fate when she ends up visiting and staying with her aunt who works at the gothic and enchanting New Newbridge Academy. Noh arrives early before the start of school where there are only teachers and no students yet to walk its high, echoing halls. But this is a dream come true to her: a giant empty school, like an ancient castle, asking to be explored, filled with mysteries and enigmas.



And then there's the West Wing, which mysteriously burned down. As Noh gets to know some of the teachers, she also meets some kids her own age, which shouldn't be possible since classes haven't started yet. It doesn't take Noh long to realize that these kids are actually all ghosts. The really strange thing is that you should only be able to see ghosts if you are one too. And then there's something that seems to be taking the ghosts, making them disappear for good.

Amber Benson seems to have found a perfect niche with *Among the Ghosts*, using a simple but descriptive and colorful language style that will keep any reader hooked and interested, as well as providing a compelling mystery that serves to compel her protagonist to find out what's going on, as well as force the reader to keep reading until the very last page.

Originally written on October 6 2010 ©Alex C. Telander.

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