

Ella Minnow Pea

Mark Dunn

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Ella Minnow Pea is an epistolary novel that centers around the lives of its title character, Ella, and the citizens of Nollop, a fictional island nation located southeast of Charleston, South Carolina. The country is named after Nevin Nollop, the author of the pangram “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” Nollop’s namesake greatly reveres him, and the town center has a cenotaph with the pangram on it. One day, the tile with “Z” falls down. Although most think that the tile fell because the glue holding it in place was old, the High Island Council believes that it was a sign from Nevin Nollop to remove that letter from their vocabulary. As more tiles fall, more letters are outlawed. This will be reflected in the text, for the story is told through the characters’ correspondence. For instance, when “D” fell, the author wrote the days of the week as Monty, Toes, Wetty, Thurby, Fribz, Satto-Gatto, and Sunshine any time a character referred to them. Many citizens of Nollop, including Ella’s parents, grow frustrated with the Council’s increasingly totalitarian ways and leave the country. Ella, on the other hand, stays behind in hopes that she and others will find a pangram that is shorter than Nevin Nollop’s phrase. If they do, the Council will be convinced that Nevin Nollop isn’t as god-like as its members thought.

I absolutely loved *Ella Minnow Pea* (and what a genius title that is!). Most of my enjoyment stemmed from Mark Dunn’s creative spelling and substitutions for certain words as the citizens of Nollop circumvent the Council’s rules. When most of the alphabet was gone, it was a bit challenging to decipher what the characters’ correspondence were saying. Eventually, it was impossible to know what each letter or note read when only L, M, N, O, and P remained. That didn’t take away from the fun, though. I also loved how Dunn gave each character their own voice.

Overall, this was a quick, entertaining read. Its themes were similar to those found in *Fahrenheit 451*, *1984*, and the like. While it wasn’t as thought-provoking or deep as those classics, *Ella Minnow Pea* was comedic and original. I think this is a great book to own and to buy as a gift for someone. It would best suit readers ages 13 and up.

Recommended Titles

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Ann Shaffer & Annie Barrows

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis

Ibid by Mark Dunn

ZOUNDS!: A Brower’s History of Interjections by Mark Dunn & Sergio Aragonés