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## Fifth Born: A Novel

By *Zelda Lockhart*



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*Fifth Born* is Zelda Lockhart's debut novel, lyrically written and powerful in its exploration of how secrets can tear apart lives and families. It is a story of love, longing, and redemption, as Odessa walks away from those whom she believes to be her kin to discover the true meaning of family.



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## **Fifth Born: A Novel By Zelda Lockhart Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #978838 in Books
- Brand: Atria Books
- Published on: 2003-08-19
- Released on: 2003-08-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .60" w x 5.31" l, .56 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 224 pages

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Set in Mississippi and Missouri in the 1970s, this strong debut novel tackles harrowing if familiar themes of family violence and abuse. As the fifth child in a family of eight siblings, Odessa Blackburn sees herself as the "invisible middle" of her family. Sexually abused by her alcoholic father early in life and then again in late childhood, Odessa feels herself pushed away by her enabling mother and alienated by her own siblings, each of whom has a different strategy for coping with the family dysfunction. As Odessa grows up, she learns that her mother is having an affair with her father's older brother, Leland, and when her father learns of it and murders Leland, Odessa is the only witness. Unable to tell anyone what she's seen or about her own molestations, Odessa turns inward to memories of the one person who has ever shown her any real love: her grandmother, whose funeral opens the book. Odessa discovers a message in her grandmother's Bible that sheds some light on the intergenerational anguish of her family: "I lived in fear so much I couldn't show you any love." As Odessa begins her quest for a haven, she finds a long-lost relative who is also the "fifth born" and plays an important role in helping her rediscover her sense of trust. First-time author Lockhart, student of bestselling author Dorothy Allison, paints a disturbing portrait of childhood sexual abuse and its repercussions, and the strain alcoholism places on a family. While little new territory is covered here from a literary standpoint, Lockhart's narrative is straightforward and lyrical, Odessa's voice is believable and the evolution of her character in the face of overwhelming alienation is as engaging as it is heartbreaking. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

Odessa is the fifth of what will eventually be eight children in the highly dysfunctional Blackburn family. She is three years old when her grandmother dies and the last shred of joy goes out of her life. The Blackburns have family ties both in a small town in Mississippi, their place of origin, and in St. Louis, where many family members have journeyed in the mostly fruitless hope of finding a better life. Their father drinks too much and terrorizes the children with his boundless, violent temper. Their mother is an ineffectual woman who makes up stories to explain away injuries and mishaps, stories that become part of family lore and skew the reality of their lives. After her mother, Odessa takes the brunt of much of the brutality, ever shrinking inside herself until she slowly learns the long-held family secrets that underlie the violence. Lockhart's first novel is evocative of Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* in its sensitive portrayal of a young girl trapped in family violence, damaged by brutality, and longing for love. *Vanessa Bush*  
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Review

*O Magazine* Lockhart's mastery of sensory detail -- the tastes, smells, sounds, and sights of Odessa's world -- roots us moment to moment in the hardscrabble life of this transcendent tale.

*Essence* A touching story told with incredible grace and subtlety.

*The San Francisco Chronicle* The language in [*Fifth Born*] is eloquent, the writing style poetic and the use of African American dialogue masterful.

Kirkus Reviews A poetic debut....An impressively mature piece of work.

Robin D. Stone With compassion, wit and grace, Zelda Lockhart gives us a new heroine: Odessa -- forgotten, betrayed, wounded in body but strong in spirit that keeps us rooting for her 'til the sweet, sweet end.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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