

BookNotes

Teacher's Guide



THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Courage
Fear
Survival
Family
Prejudice

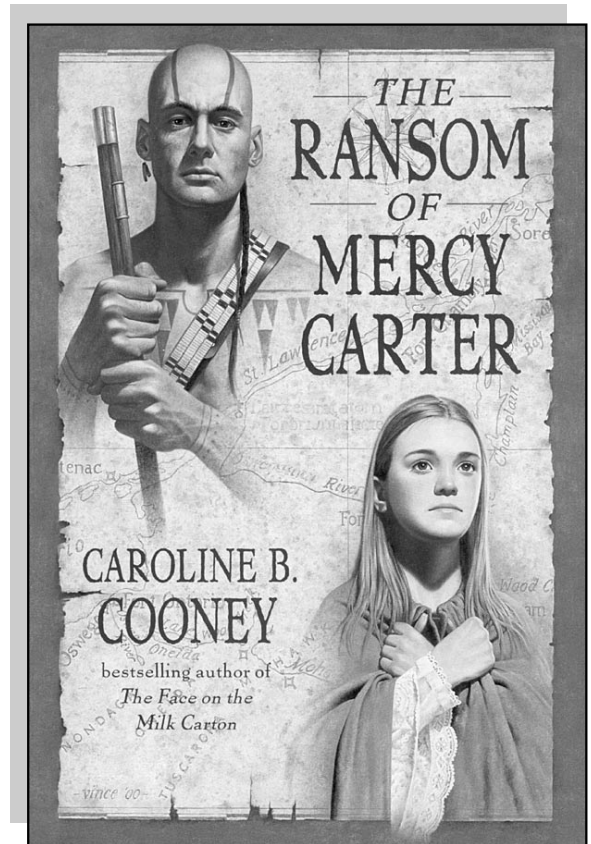
Grades 7 up

About the Book

Mercy Carter is taken captive by the Mohawk Indians during the French and Indian War and brought to Canada where she is converted to the Indian way of life.

Mercy Carter lives with her family in Deerfield, Massachusetts, a remote settlement in the English colonies, when the small town is attacked by Mohawk Indians in 1704. The attack, which lasts only a few hours, changes the lives of everyone in the town, but 11-year-old Mercy Carter changes in ways that even she cannot believe.

The Indians take their captives on a 300-mile journey through ice and snow to the Indian village of Kahnawake in Canada, where they are expected to follow Indian ways. The only hope for the captives is that the English government will send ransom. As days turn into weeks and weeks into months, Mercy becomes comfortable with Indian life, and she begins to see her captors as her family rather than the enemy. Her new life leaves her contemplating a question that will determine her fate: If ransom comes, will she leave?



Delacorte Press hardcover • 0-385-32615-7

"Gripping and thought-provoking."

—Publishers Weekly

Pre-Reading Activity


Help students understand the historical setting of the novel by providing background information about the French and Indian War. Discuss with students the major reasons for the war and the role of the French in the war. How did the French use Indians to help fight the war? How did the English colonies fight back?


THEMATIC Connections


In the Classroom


Based on actual events, this compelling story, set during the French and Indian War, offers students the opportunity to explore the personal tragedies that occurred during this bloody fight over the fur trade. This novel is an excellent choice to use in the social studies curriculum.


In addition, there are activities in this guide that link the novel to the language arts, science, math, art, and music curricula. There are discussion questions that invite students to think critically about the themes of courage, fear, survival, family, and prejudice.

 **COURAGE**—Ask students to define courage. How might Mercy Carter define courage? How did children in the colonies learn courage in their daily lives? There are times throughout the journey that Mercy shows an exceptional amount of courage. Discuss whether her courage is driven by feelings of responsibility for her siblings. At what moments does she almost lose her courage?

 **FEAR**—People deal with fear in different ways. Compare and contrast how Mercy, Ruth, and Eben deal with fear. How do they help one another face their fears? At what point in the novel does Mercy lose her fear and begin to feel safe among the Indians? How is this shown through the author's use of language?

 **SURVIVAL**—Many of the people taken captive in Deerfield die on the 300-mile journey. How do the Indians decide who will live and who will die? Why are the survivors important to the Indians? It becomes evident early in the story that Mercy Carter is a survivor. What is it about Mercy's personality that makes her a survivor? Discuss things that she learns about the Indians that make her survive the horrendous journey.

 **FAMILY**—Discuss Mercy's role in keeping her family together. Why do the Indians separate family members on the journey to Canada? Why does Mercy feel guilty about Marah's death? Discuss the structure of the Indian family. Why is Mercy surprised at the daily routine of the Indian women and children? At what point in the novel does Mercy begin to feel part of the Indian family?

 **PREJUDICE**—The people of Deerfield often refer to the Indians as "savages." Discuss with students why such a derogatory term was used to describe the Indians. Ask students if they feel the term is applicable. At what point in the novel does Mercy discover that these "savages" have their own traditions and family. How does she feel about the Indians by the end of the novel?

INTERDISCIPLINARY *Connections*

LANGUAGE ARTS—Ask students to study the Indian names in the novel. How do the names fit the personalities of the individuals? At first, Ruth's name is Mahakemo (Fire Eats Her) and then she is given the name Spukumenen (Let the Sky In). Ask students to write a character sketch of Ruth that explains her name change. Ask students to create an Indian name for themselves and to explain its meaning.

Each chapter of the novel begins with the date, place, and temperature. Why are these facts pertinent to the story? Explain that historical novels often list the time and setting in order to add relevance and impact. Ask students to compare the structure of this novel with journal writing. How are they similar? What are the differences?

SOCIAL STUDIES—Mercy is surprised by the construction of the Indian houses. Ask students to research how the Mohawk Indians constructed their houses and how their villages were arranged. Then have them construct a miniature Mohawk Indian village.

SCIENCE—Many of the settlers suffer frostbite on the journey. Ask students to research the treatment for frostbite. Ask them to list other diseases that the settlers face—e.g., dysentery. Then ask them to use books in the library media center or sites on the Internet to learn about herbs that Indians used to treat such diseases.

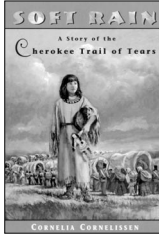
MATH—The Mohawk Indians lived in the village of Kahnawake on the St. Lawrence River. Ask students to locate Deerfield, Massachusetts, on a map and trace various routes that the Indians could have taken with their captives to their final destination. Calculate the approximate mileage of each route. Then ask students to use information in the novel to determine the probable route that the Indians took from Deerfield to Kahnawake.

ART—Quilting is an art form that was practiced by many colonial women. Ask students to find pictures of quilts created by Faith Ringgold and study the stories that she creates with her quilt designs. Read *Tar Beach* together. Instruct students to use squares of construction paper to create a story quilt that tells Mercy Carter's tale, beginning with her captivity and ending with her decision to remain with the Indians.

Vocabulary/ Use of Language

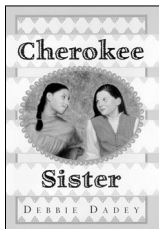
The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, and the Indian words are explained within the text. Have students write down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from the context of the story. Such words may include *quartered* (p. 2), *sentries* (p. 4), *melee* (p. 20), *rancid* (p. 34), *gauntlet* (p. 79), *sinews* (p. 96), *precipice* (p. 109), and *frippery* (p. 179).

RELATED NOVELS by theme and topic



Soft Rain

A Story of the Cherokee Trail of Tears
Cornelia Cornelissen
Family • Prejudice • Survival
Historical Fiction (1838 Trail of Tears)
Grades 4–6 / 0-440-41242-0



Cherokee Sister Debbie Dadey

Survival • Prejudice • Fear
Historical Fiction (1838 Trail of Tears)
Grades 4–6 / 0-385-32703-X

Johnny Tremain Esther Forbes

Courage • Survival • Fear
Revolutionary War
Grades 6 up / 0-440-94250-0

The Slave Dancer Paula Fox

Courage • Survival • Fear
Historical Fiction (1840s)
Grades 6 up / 0-440-96132-7

The Sign of the Beaver Elizabeth George Speare

Courage • Survival • Fear
Colonial America
Grades 5–7 / 0-440-47900-2



Photo credit: © Tim Keating

ABOUT *the Author*

Caroline B. Cooney is the author of many young adult novels. They include *Tune In Anytime*; *Burning Up*; *The Face on the Milk Carton* (An IRA–CBC Children’s Choice Book) and its companions, *Whatever Happened to Janie?*, *The Voice on the Radio* (each an ALA Best Book for Young Adults), and *What Janie Found*; *What Child Is This?* (an ALA Best Book for Young Adults); *Driver’s Ed* (an ALA Best Book for Young Adults and a Booklist Children’s Editors’ Choice); *Among Friends*; *Twenty Pageants Later*; and the time-travel romance trilogy *Both Sides of Time*, *Out of Time*, and *Prisoner of Time*. Caroline B. Cooney lives in Westbrook, Connecticut.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Encyclopædia Britannica: French and Indian War

www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/1/0,5716,36001+1+35340,00.html

A brief descriptive entry about the French and Indian War from *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Cross-references within the text link to other entries about people or events relating to the war.

Kahon:wes’s Mohawk & Iroquois Index

www.kahonwes.com

A discussion of the Mohawk Nation including samples of the Mohawk language.

The Wampum Chronicles

www.wampumchronicles.com

A well-researched Web site of Mohawk history.

Old Deerfield, Massachusetts

www.old-deerfield.org

The official site for historic Deerfield, Massachusetts.

Prepared by Pat Scales, Director of Library Services, the South Carolina Governor’s School for the Arts and Humanities, Greenville, South Carolina.

Random House Children’s Books • School and Library Marketing
1540 Broadway • New York, NY 10036

BN540 3/01
Printed in the U.S.A. Suggested Retail Value: \$3.50

On the Web!

For additional activities, author bios, teacher’s guides, and more . . .

Visit our *free* online site

Teachers @ Random

Be sure to sign up for our online newsletter!

www.randomhouse.com/teachers