

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



NYT and *USA TODAY* and *L. A. TIMES* bestselling author, Kim Michele Richardson resides in her home state of Kentucky. She is the author of the bestselling memoir *The Unbreakable Child*, and a book critic for the *New York Journal of Books*. Her novels include *Liar's Bench*, *GodPretty in the Tobacco Field* and *The Sisters of Glass Ferry*. Kim Michele latest novel is *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, a *NYT* bestseller about the fierce and brave Kentucky Packhorse librarians of Kentucky. - Amazon.com

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Kentucky Pack Horse program was implemented in 1935 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to create women's work programs and to assist economic recovery and build literacy. Looking at the novel, how did the program affect the people in this remote area? Do you think library programs are still a vital part of our society today?
2. How has a librarian or book lover impacted your life? Have you ever connected with a book or author in a meaningful way? Explain.
3. Missionaries, government, social workers, and various religious groups have always visited eastern Kentucky to reform, modernize, and mold hill folk to their acceptable standards. Do you think Cussy faced this kind of prejudice from the outside world? Is there any prejudice or stigma associated with the people of Appalachia today?
4. How do you think Cussy's father feels after he marries her off to an abusive man? Why do you think he agrees to Charlie Frazier's proposal in the first place? What do you imagine life was like for an unwed woman at that time?
5. Imagine you are making a community scrapbook like the ones Cussy distributes to the people of Troublesome. What would you include? Do you think these materials were helpful to Cussy's library patrons?

6. When Cussy receives the cure for her blueness from Doc, she realizes there's a price to pay for her white skin, and the side effects soon become too much to handle. If you were in Cussy's shoes, would you sacrifice your health for a chance at "normalcy"? If there weren't any side effects, do you think Cussy would have continued to take the medication? Would you?
7. How do you think Cussy feels when she is ostracized at the Independence Day celebration, despite her change of skin color? Can you relate to her feelings of isolation? Do you think these kinds of racial prejudices are still prevalent today?
8. Cussy has to deal with the loss of many loved ones in a very short amount of time. How do you think she handles her grief? Which loss was the most difficult for you to read?
9. What do you think life was like for the people of Troublesome? What are some of the highlights of living in such a remote place? What are some of the challenges the people on Cussy's library route face?
10. Back then, entering into a prohibited or interracial marriage in Kentucky was a misdemeanor that could result in incarceration, and we see these racial tensions attempt to sever Cussy and Jackson's relationship. Discuss anti-miscegenation laws and marriage laws. Do you think this kind of prejudice still exists toward interracial couples?
11. What do you think happens to Cussy, Jackson, Honey, and the other inhabitants of Troublesome after the story ends? Imagine you were Cussy. How would you feel leaving Troublesome for good?
12. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group?
13. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

<https://readinggroupchoices.com/books/book-woman-of-troublesome-creek/>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Cussy Mary Carter knows no one will want to marry her with her blue skin, a rare hereditary condition sometimes found in the mountains of Kentucky. She prefers it that way, since a married woman cannot work for the WPA, and being a Pack Horse librarian is the one light in her lonely, hardscrabble life. But her coal-miner father wants Cussy to be taken care of, which leads to a disastrous, mercifully brief marriage. Now the Widow Frazier—though she prefers what her young patrons call her, the Book Woman—is free to deliver scant reading materials to the most remote hollows of Troublesome Creek. Though Richardson's latest (after *The Sisters of Glass Ferry*, 2017) is essentially about the power of reading and libraries, it also explores the extreme rural poverty of 1930s Appalachia and labor unrest among coal miners. Readers will respond to quiet Cussy's steel spine as she undergoes cruel medical tests to "'cure'" her blueness, and book groups who like to explore lesser-known aspects of American history will be fascinated. -- Susan Maguire (Reviewed 4/1/2019) (Booklist, vol 115, number 15, p15)

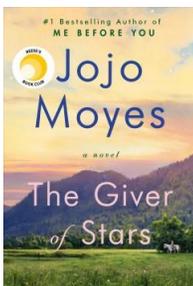
Publisher's Weekly

This gem of a historical from Richardson (*The Sisters of Glass Ferry*) features an indomitable heroine navigating a community steeped in racial intolerance. In 1936, 19-year-old Cussy Mary Carter works for the New Deal–funded Pack Horse Library Project, delivering reading material to the rural people of Kentucky. It's a way of honoring her dead mother, who loved books, and it almost makes her forget the fact that her skin is blue, a family trait that sets her apart from the white community. The personable and dedicated Cussy forges friendships through her job, including with handsome farmer Jackson Lovett, who becomes Cussy's love interest. Cussy's ailing coal miner father, Elijah, insists she marry, but the elderly husband he finds for her, Charlie Frazier, dies on their wedding night. Pastor Vester Frazier, a vengeful relative, blames Cussy for Charlie's death and starts stalking her. The local doctor steps in to help, and Cussy repays Doc by letting him perform medical tests on her to learn the cause of her blue skin. A potential cure for Cussy's blue skin and a surprise marriage proposal set in motion a final quarrel among the townspeople over segregation laws that threatens Cussy's chance at happiness. Though the ending is abrupt and some historical information feels clumsily inserted, readers will adore the memorable Cussy and appreciate Richardson's fine rendering of rural Kentucky life. Agent: Stacy Testa, Writers House. (May) --Staff (Reviewed 03/11/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 10, p)

Library Journal

Richardson (*Liar's Bench*) takes readers to 1930s Troublesome Creek, KY, where Cussy Mary Carter works as a Kentucky Pack Horse Librarian. Under Roosevelt's WPA (Works Progress Administration), the Pack Horse Librarian initiative put unmarried women to work delivering books to remote locations in an effort to boost both literacy and female employment. Cussy Mary is not only a Pack Horse Librarian, she's a Blue. She's assumed to be the last of her kind—a group of blue-skinned folks regularly shunned, persecuted, and sometimes killed by white locals. Cussy Mary's work to spread literacy through the hills meets with her family's battles against poverty and racial animus, as a doctor sets out to "cure" her of her blue skin. Will turning Cussy Mary into a white woman solve her troubles? VERDICT Based on true stories from different times (the blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the WPA's Pack Horse Librarians), this novel packs a lot of hot topics into one narrative. Perfect for book clubs. --Julie Kane (Reviewed 05/01/2019) (Library Journal, vol 144, issue 4, p86)

READALIKES



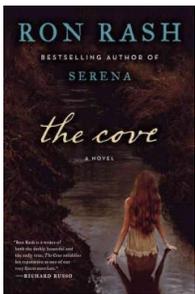
***The Giver of Stars* by Jojo Moyes**

Volunteering for Eleanor Roosevelt's new traveling library in small-town Kentucky, an English bride joins a group of independent women whose commitment to their job transforms the community and their relationships.



***Over the Plain Houses* by Julia Franks**

A Depression-era Appalachian farm wife is branded as a witch by her fundamentalist husband when she bonds with a USDA agent who has traveled to the North Carolina mountains to instruct regional families on how to modernize their homes and farms.



***The Cove* by Ron Rash**

Living deep within a cove in the Appalachians of North Carolina during World War I, Laurel Shelton finally finds the happiness she deserves in Walter, a mysterious stranger who's mute, but their love can't protect them from a devastating secret.