

A CONVERSATION WITH JOYCE SIDMAN

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I love color in a visceral way, and I think most children do, too. It is no accident that every child has a favorite color instead of, say, a favorite letter or insect. Color has the power to affect emotions, to lift spirits; and lack of color—like the gray days of November—dampens everything. I simply wanted to celebrate my love of color and the seasons with others.

What research did you undertake in writing *Red Sings from Treetops*?

Daily walks in the woods throughout the year, using all my senses!

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

There were two main challenges: one, to convey the strength and depth of what I was feeling; and two, to find language that was fresh and new, since several good books about color have already been written for children.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Red Sings from Treetops*?

A feeling of joy at the splendor of the world around them. Or, at the very least, a

nod to that cardinal, singing his heart out at the top of a nearby tree.

What do you like most about the book?

I am thrilled with the richness of the illustrations. Pamela Zagarenski captured the feeling of the book so well—and added infinitely more. She created a magical world in which there are windows in trees, birds wearing crowns, and whales floating through the night sky. And she makes us believe in it.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

From early on, I felt compelled to write. Words came into my head, and I wrote them down. I think a lot of writers are like this. Writing helps us understand the world; we'd be lost without it. I rediscovered children's literature after sharing it with my own children. It was a long road to publication, but now I am very lucky to be working with an editor who encourages me.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I teach about 4-5 weeks a

year as a writer in residence at local schools, which I love. Kids are natural poets, and their creativity and exuberance delight me. I also volunteer at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis, distributing library books to hospitalized children. Beyond that, I love dogs, gardens, chocolate—and reading, of course!


THE FRIENDS
OF THE SAINT PAUL
PUBLIC LIBRARY
325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242
www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: **651-366-6497**

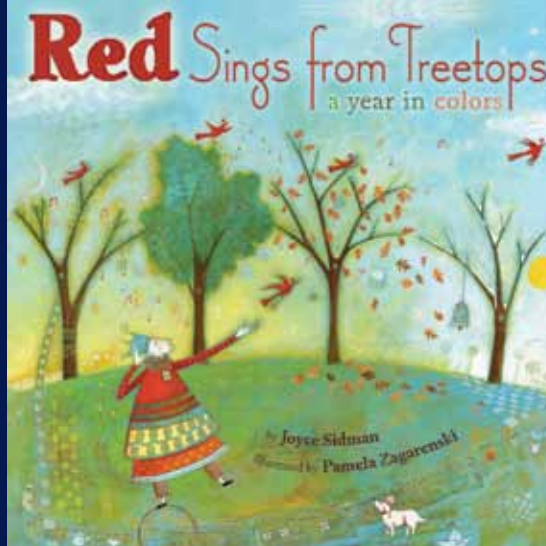
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL


MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Children's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Books for Africa



Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors

by Joyce Sidman,
illustrated by Pamela Zagarenski

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors



SUMMARY:

This imaginative book describes the changing colors of the seasons with beautiful poems and vivid illustrations that bring colors to life. Blue dances on summer lakes, green drips from spring leaves, and black wafts mysteriously through autumn evenings. Color becomes more than something visual; it becomes something that can be felt, heard, tasted or smelled.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which is your favorite season, and why? What colors do you associate with that time?
2. Why do you think the author began the book with spring? What season would you begin with, and why?
3. What is your favorite color and why?
4. Do you think the rain can really “taste green”? What color do you think rain tastes like?
5. Why do you think the characters are wearing crowns?
6. What role do you think the cardinal plays in the book?
7. The author wrote the book in a style that’s called poetry. What is poetry?
8. If you wrote a book for children, what would you write about?
9. What is your favorite page in the book, and why?
10. If you illustrated *Red Sings from Treetops*, what would your pictures look like?



ABOUT JOYCE SIDMAN

Joyce Sidman is the award-winning author of two Caldecott Honor books, *Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors* and *Song of the Water Boatman and Other Pond Poems*, as well as other fine books of poetry for children. She lives in Wayzata with her family. Joyce’s favorite color is the soft green of early spring.

Visit www.joycesidman.com to learn more about the author and her work.



Photo by Scott Streble



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children’s Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People’s Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers’ Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children’s Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges’ Sponsors:** Beaver’s Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; Saint Paul Almanac.

A CONVERSATION WITH JUDE NUTTER

What inspired you to write your award-winning collection?

The poems at the core of the book (the ones that explore my connections to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp) have been around, in one form or another, for some time. They pushed me into exploring the whole idea of “bearing witness” and remembering the dead; which, in turn, led me to the whole concept of the poem as a means of *resurrecting* the dead. I used Whitman’s quote about the Civil War dead (“The dead to me mar not...”) as something to push against throughout the whole collection. It’s important to understand that I’m not *arguing* with Whitman here; I’m simply trying to formulate my own responses to war and remembrance.

What research did you undertake in writing *I Wish I Had a Heart Like Yours, Walt Whitman*?

I’ve been visiting Germany (where I grew up) every spring for several years, in order to revisit the haunts of my childhood and make use of the archives at the Bergen-Belsen Documentation Centre. As a European, my sense of history is very visceral—there is no landscape in Europe that is not haunted by war—so simply returning

to Europe and being in the physical landscape is, in itself, a form of research for me.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the collection?

My main concern was that I would not appropriate or diminish the experiences of those who have been the direct victims of war and persecution. I use the childhood self—the insect collector, who I regard as my alter ego—to chart my own very personal journey into historical awareness.

We are told by the culture at large that if we haven’t experienced a war or conflict, then we have no right to speak out, or claim knowledge. I don’t believe this, and to paraphrase what I say in one of the poems: “who among us was born into a world without war?” I had to silence those voices that were telling me I had no authority to write about war and conflict. War affects us all; we all have the authority to articulate the ways it impacts our lives and our thinking.

What do you like most about *I Wish I Had a Heart Like Yours, Walt Whitman*?

The way it came together: the “war” poems and the “nature” poems interwoven.

I’ve always wanted to structure a collection that uses my childhood experiences of growing up in Germany as a way into other concerns, and this happened here.

What was your journey to becoming a published poet?

I didn’t choose or decide to become a writer! I knew as a child, that I lived in—and through—language. There was never any other option for me. To not write, to not work hard at my craft, would have been a kind of death.

How do you enjoy spending time when you’re not writing?

Dare I say that I’m miserable when I’m not writing?! It’s true—those times between poems are agony. You have to trust that the muse will return; you have to turn to the world and be receptive. I love to walk and I love to read. I watch a lot of foreign films. I spend time with friends. I loaf a lot, as Whitman said we must do!



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children’s Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People’s Literature

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: **651-366-6497**

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Poetry Winner



I WISH I HAD A HEART
LIKE YOURS, WALT WHITMAN

POEM # 27

Jude Nutter

*I Wish I Had a Heart Like
Yours, Walt Whitman*

by Jude Nutter

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PRESS

I Wish I Had a Heart Like Yours, Walt Whitman



SUMMARY:

In this collection, the poet invokes, invites and revises Walt Whitman's civil war poems through contemporary and female perspectives. Through expansive, passionate lyrics full of clarity, imagination and sureness of vision, the poems bridge the gap between past and present, loss and reclamation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the collection's main themes?
2. What is the meaning of the book's title, and why do you think the poet chose this particular title?
3. Poetry is often the genre of choice for exploring personal and cultural upheaval. Why is this? What is it about poetry, about how poetry uses language, that makes it ideal for the act of "bearing witness"?
4. The Bergen-Belsen poems all begin with the same stanza. Why do you think the poet has used this device? What effects does it create?
5. How do the poems that open and close the book ("Lamb" and "Wolves") frame the collection? How are these poems linked, both in terms of tone and subject?
6. In her review of the book, the poet Deborah Keenan writes that these poems explore and chart what war "accomplishes and destroys." How do you see this being manifest in individual poems and the collection as a whole?

7. Which poem do you find most intriguing? What is it about this poem that interests you in light of its subject and structure and the larger philosophical questions it raises?
8. In what ways does the work of Walt Whitman inform this collection? Discuss the influence of his war poems and of his general aesthetic.
9. What emotions did you experience while reading the collection?
10. What experiences have you had with war, and did the poems conjure up any memories?

About Jude Nutter

Jude Nutter has been published in numerous journals and is the recipient of several national and international poetry awards. Her second collection, *The Curator of Silence*, won both



a Minnesota Book Award and the Ernest Sandeen Prize in 2007. Jude was born in North Yorkshire, England and grew up in northern Germany. She now lives in Edina.

Visit www.judenutter.net to learn more about the poet and her work.



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children's Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People's Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers' Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children's Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges' Sponsors:** Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; Saint Paul Almanac.

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID HOUSEWRIGHT

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I wanted to do something with the gangsters that I knew lived in Saint Paul during the first three and a half decades of the century.

What research did you undertake in writing *Jelly's Gold*?

I lived in the Minnesota History Center for about six weeks, sifting through their archives as well as reading all the newspapers from that time, which fortunately are saved on microfilm.

How long did it take you to write the book?

About five months, which is a personal best for me. Usually it takes me about nine months to write a book.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *Jelly's Gold*?

Getting the historical facts right was the big challenge. There are an enormous number of stories that came out of that period of Saint Paul's history that simply could not be true. For example, I know for a fact that Al Capone was in prison during the time when I'm told he was shooting it out with Feds in a resort near Brainerd.

What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I want to give them a sense of the city during that period. You need to understand that the O'Connor System (that allowed criminals to stay in Saint Paul without fear of prosecution as long as they refrained from committing a crime here) was not a secret. The entire city was an accomplice in this. What's more, the system did not last for just a few years during Prohibition—as many people suppose—but for 35 years. Think about that. For an entire generation a major American city was safe haven for every kind of cutthroat—and people liked it that way!

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I've always wanted to be a writer and can't remember ever wanting to do anything else. My journey, if you want to call it that, was so conventional and painless as to be boring. When I was in school, I wrote for anyone who would let me, and when I got out of school, I did the same, starting out in newspapers before drifting into advertising.

It took me a year to write my first book. It took me another year to find an agent who liked it as much as I did. It took my agent a year to find a publisher that shared our enthusiasm. The book came out in September of 1994. Six months later it was nominated for an Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America. Eight weeks later it won. Since then I have been nominated for the Minnesota Book Award (won twice) and a Shamus from the Private Eye Writers of America. My tenth book came out in June of 2010. Boring!



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's
Literature

General
Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir &
Creative
Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short
Story

Poetry

Young People's
Literature

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: **651-366-6497.**

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL


MINNESOTA
BOOK AWARDS

Genre Fiction Winner

Category sponsored by
Wellington Management, Inc.

JELLY'S
GOLD

A McKenzie Novel



DAVID
HOUSEWRIGHT

EDGAR AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *MADMAN ON A DRUM*

Jelly's Gold

by David Housewright

MINOTAUR BOOKS

Jelly's Gold



SUMMARY:

Rushmore McKenzie, a retired Saint Paul policeman, often works as an unlicensed P.I. When two graduate students show up with a story about \$8 million in gold that has been missing since the 1930s, McKenzie is intrigued. As the story goes, Frank "Jelly" Nash was suspected of masterminding a daring robbery of gold bars in 1933, and when he was later killed, the treasure was left somewhere in Saint Paul. Two thugs are also in competition to find the gold, and McKenzie gets increasingly involved when the hunt turns deadly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. It was said that if a criminal hadn't been seen for a while during the 1930s, either look for him in prison or in Saint Paul. What made it possible for Saint Paul to serve as a safe haven for all types of criminals?
3. What did you learn about Saint Paul's history that you found most surprising or interesting?
4. Rushford McKenzie often does "wrong" things for what he believes are the "right" reasons. In what instances do you believe McKenzie doing the wrong thing is the right thing to do, and are there instances when it is wrong?
5. If you are friends with a "bad guy," does that make you a bad guy?
6. Should someone be embarrassed by actions of his/her parents that took place before they were born?
7. The author's favorite character is Heavenly. What were your reactions to this character, and why do you think the author chose the name, "Heavenly"?
8. Which 1930s character and which modern day character did you find to be most intriguing?

9. At what point in the book did you figure out the identity of the killer? What clues are given?
10. When you think about the elements that make a really good mystery, what are they, and to what extent are they used in *Jelly's Gold*?

About David Housewright

David Housewright has worked as a journalist covering both crime and sports, an advertising copywriter and creative director, and a writing instructor. He has won a number of awards for his crime fiction, including two Minnesota Book Awards. David's tenth book, *The Taking of Libbie, SD*, was released in June 2010.

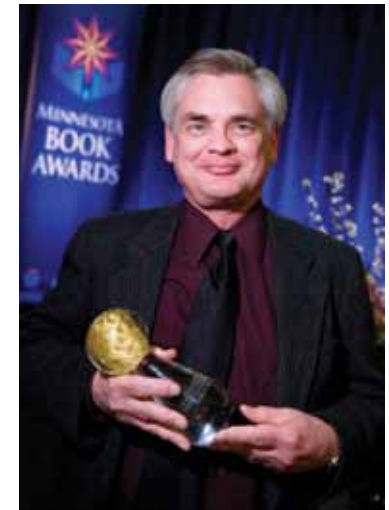


Photo by Scott Strebble

Visit www.davidhousewright.com to learn more about the author and his work.



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children's Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People's Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers' Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children's Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges' Sponsors:** Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; Saint Paul Almanac.

A CONVERSATION WITH JOY K. LINTELMAN

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I had been researching Swedish immigrant women's lives for a number of years when I discovered Mina Anderson's handwritten memoir in the collection of Vilhelm Moberg at an archive in Sweden. Though Mina wrote the memoir for Moberg, he did not present Swedish immigrant women as independent, determined, and forward-looking as was described in Mina's life story and which resonated in the experiences of the many other women that I had studied.

What research did you undertake in writing *I Go to America*?

The book is the result of years of research, both in Sweden and the U.S. Filling in all of the pieces of Mina's life that weren't covered in the memoir led me to the farm where she lived, to the places she worked in Norway, to her birthplace in Sweden. It involved work with the state and federal census, reading through years of Swedish American newspapers on microfilm, searching public records and church records, and interviewing Mina's descendants.

How long did it take to complete the book?

I researched, while teaching full-time and raising my own family, off and on for over a decade. In this way I could

really identify with how Mina must have struggled to find time to read and write. The actual writing of the book took two to three summers. With my teaching and professional responsibilities during the academic year, it is very difficult to research and write except in the summer or when on sabbatical leave.

What do you hope your readers take away from *I Go to America*?

I hope that readers with Swedish heritage will gain knowledge and respect for their Swedish American foremothers, and that through the intimate account of Mina's life provided in the book, they are able to imagine and even identify with some of her feelings and experiences. I also hope readers will be motivated to investigate their own heritage a bit further—to not only research the names of their ancestors and where they were born and lived, but how they lived, the choices they made, and how they were shaped by, as well as shaped, the world around them.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Finding the time to research and write while balancing the responsibilities of family and job was the biggest challenge. Trying to find details of Mina's life was at times like looking for a needle in a haystack—

painstaking and time-consuming, but also incredibly rewarding, if—and when—information was found. For example, Mina wrote in a Swedish American newspaper under the pen name Cecilia. I looked through about twenty years of microfilm of this weekly newspaper searching for letters, stories, and poems she had written, and trying to understand this community of readers and writers that played an important part in her life. It was slow going as Swedish is not my native language, and I only began studying it in graduate school.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

Living in Minnesota has had a significant impact on my writing. It influenced my choice of undergraduate institution, Gustavus Adolphus College, which resulted in my discovery of Swedish American history. Many of my research resources are located in Minnesota, so living and working in the state continually influence my research and teaching.



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: **651-366-6497.**

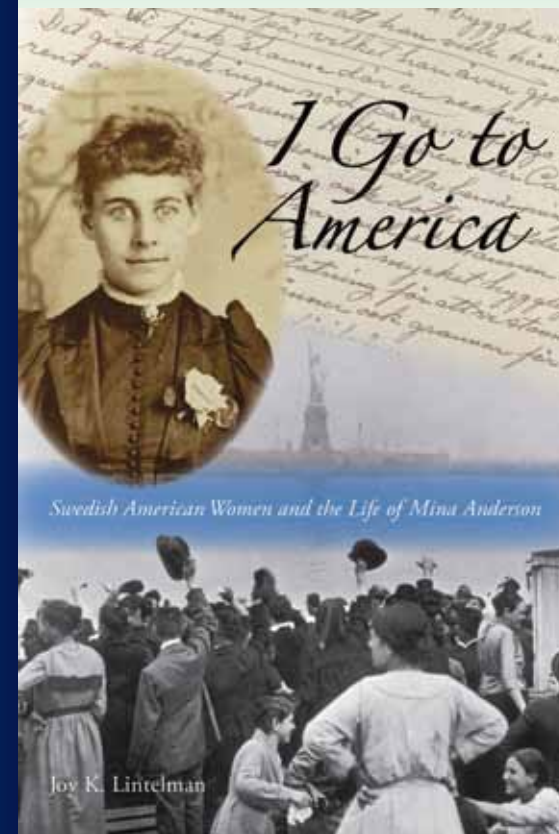
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

General Nonfiction Winner

Category sponsored by Minnesota AFL-CIO



I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson

by Joy K. Lintelman

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS

I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson



SUMMARY:

I Go to America showcases the previously untranslated memoir written by Mina Anderson, tracing her trip across the Atlantic Ocean from Sweden to make a new life in America. The book explores Mina's life as a domestic servant in the Twin Cities and her family life in rural Mille Lacs County where she and her husband worked a farm and raised seven children. She contributed widely to rural Swedish community life through her poetry, fiction, and letters to Swedish American newspapers. Joy Lintelman offers readers both an intimate portrait of Mina Anderson's life and a window into the lives of nearly 250,000 young, single Swedish women who immigrated to America from 1881 to 1920.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways do you think the immigration to America of Swedish women like Mina Anderson has shaped the Midwest?
2. Given the circumstances that women like Mina faced in 19th century Sweden, do you think you would have opted to stay in Sweden or immigrate?
3. How did the author's use of excerpts from Mina Anderson's memoir to open each chapter shape your reaction to the book?
4. How was reading this book similar to or different from reading a historical novel?
5. How are the experiences of the women written about in *I Go to America* both like and unlike that of immigrant women in contemporary America? What are the most significant differences, and in what ways does the present mirror the era written about in the book?
6. To what extent do you think Mina's gender, social class, ethnicity, and race shaped her options and experiences?
7. To what degree have gender, social class, ethnicity, and race shaped your own education, employment, and the way you view the world?
8. From what sources did Mina Anderson draw her strength over the eight decades of her life?
9. To what extent do you think Mina incorporated aspects of her cultural heritage into her new identity as an American?
10. What advantages or opportunities do you have that were not available to your grandmother or great-grandmother?

About Joy K. Lintelman:

Joy K. Lintelman is a professor of history at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Her areas of research include Swedish immigration history and women's history. A Fulbright Scholar, Joy has lived and traveled in Sweden.



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children's Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People's Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers' Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children's Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges' Sponsors:** Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; Saint Paul Almanac.

A CONVERSATION WITH KATE DICAMILLO

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

The Magician's Elephant began, for me, when a magician popped into my head. I could see that he was a desperate character, a magician who was tired of performing sleights of hand, cheap tricks and who wanted to perform real magic.

What research did you undertake in writing *The Magician's Elephant*?

Happily, I didn't have to do any research. I made it all up.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

I had never written a book with so many characters. I knew that they all had to meet, converge, but I didn't know how it was going to happen.

What do you hope your readers take away from *The Magician's Elephant*?

Hope—the sense that impossible things may be possible.

What do you like most about the book?

The illustrations—haunting paintings by Yoko Tanaka.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I decided that I wanted to be a writer when I was in college, but it wasn't until I was thirty years old that I actually started writing. It's still hard for me to believe that I'm now making a living as a full-time writer.

How has being a Minnesotan informed your writing?

I didn't start writing seriously until I moved to Minnesota from Florida. Being here has shaped me (writing groups), changed me (having Jane Resh Thomas as a teacher) and encouraged me (Loft/McKnight grants). Also, the cold woke me up.

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: **651-366-6497**



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL


MINNESOTA
BOOK AWARDS

Young People's Literature
Winner

Category sponsored by 3M

KATE DICAMILLO


THE MAGICIAN'S
ELEPHANT

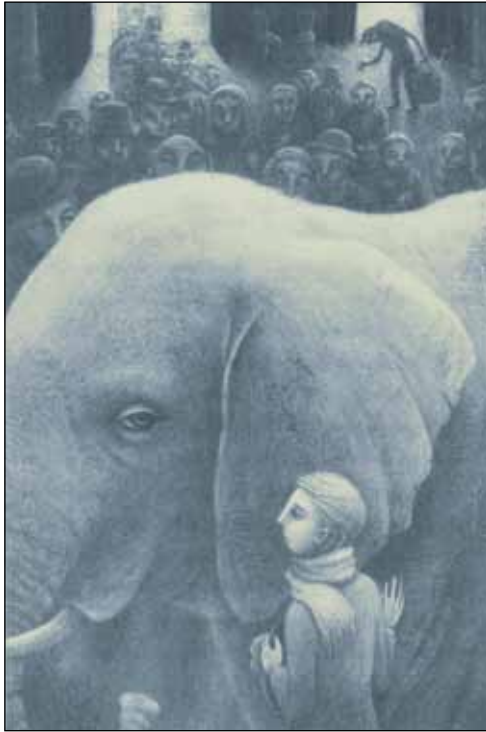
Illustrated by Yoko Tanaka

The Magician's Elephant

by Kate DiCamillo
Illustrated by Yoko Tanaka

CANDLEWICK PRESS

The Magician's Elephant



SUMMARY:

Peter Augustus Duchene is a ten-year-old orphan who is training to be a soldier in the city of Baltese. He was told his parents and sister are dead, but the fortuneteller he visits tells him his sister is alive and

that an elephant will lead him to her. This initially seems a bit silly and improbable; however, when one magically appears, Peter vows to find a way to enlist the elephant's help in finding his sister.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What words best describe Peter? In what ways, if any, do Peter's experiences in looking for his sister change him?
3. Why do you think the city of Baltese was chosen as the book's location instead of another city, such as London or Minneapolis?
4. What role do the illustrations play? Did they enhance your reading experience?
5. What does the elephant represent?
6. Is the magician the only one in the book who performs magic?
7. What in the book makes you happy, and what makes you sad or uncomfortable?
8. What is the greatest evil in the book, and what is the greatest good? In which characters do you see both good and bad?
9. What question would you ask a fortuneteller, and

how likely are you to believe what he/she tells you? Are there questions you would be too afraid to ask for fear of what you might be told?

10. What do you think of the book's ending? Do all of the characters have a happy ending?

ABOUT KATE DICAMILLO

Kate DiCamillo is the author of many beloved and award-winning books for young readers, including The Tale of Despereaux, which received a Newbery Medal. She writes for both children and adults and likes to think of herself as a storyteller. Kate was born in Philadelphia and raised in Clermont, Florida. She now lives in Minneapolis.



Visit www.katedicamillo.com to learn more about the author and her work.

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVE KENNEY

What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

You name it. I mined the local Council's minimally-organized archives as well as various newspaper archives and collections belonging to the Minnesota Historical Society and county historical societies. Personal interviews were also an important part of the research.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Honor Bright*?

I hope readers come away with an appreciation of how the history of the Boy Scouts intersects frequently, and in interesting ways, with the broader histories of Minnesota and the United States.

What challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

One of the biggest challenges was deciding how to approach the subject of homosexuality. About ten years ago, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was involved in a case that resulted in a U.S. Supreme Court decision ruling affirming the BSA's right to exclude homosexuals from

membership. In the end, my client, the Northern Star Council, supported me in my contention that we needed to be forthright in our telling of that part of the story.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

My writing addiction began in the mid 1980s when I was a local television reporter. I enjoyed the writing part of my job more than most of the reporters I knew, and I continued to enjoy word craft after landing a job as a writer with CNN. After more than a decade in television, I decided to make the jump to the print world, first as a local magazine writer and finally as an author of Minnesota history books.

What is your biggest dream for your writing career?

I hope at some point in the not too distant future to write a history of an event with true national significance. I've spent parts of the last several years researching the story of the racial desegregation of bowling (yes, bowling), and I like to think that I may be able to find a national publisher for that work.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I like to hang out with my family (my wife, Nancy and daughters, Helen and Grace). With my flexible, freelancer schedule, making time for family is pretty easy.



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

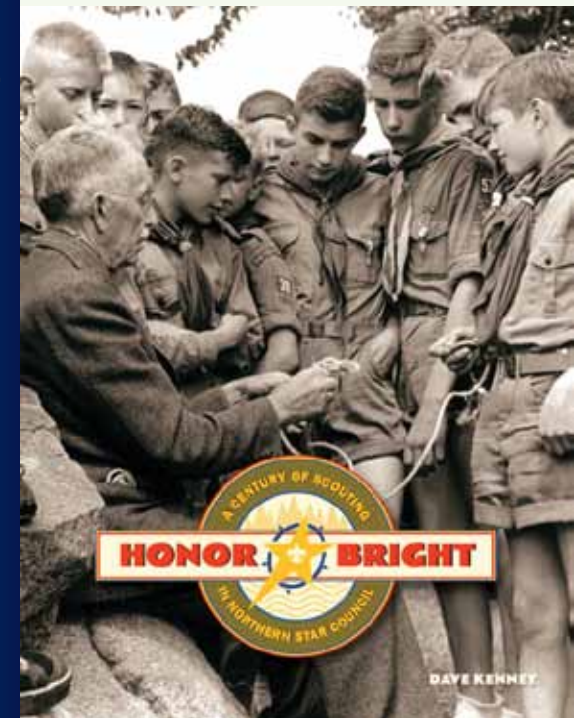
The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: 651-366-6497.

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Readers' Choice Winner

Sponsored by
Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com



***Honor Bright: A Century of Scouting
in Northern Star Council***

by Dave Kenney

NORTHERN STAR COUNCIL, BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Honor Bright

SUMMARY:

This captivating and richly illustrated organizational history consists of stories and photographs of the Boy Scouts of America's first century in central Minnesota and western Wisconsin. From the start of the Boy Scout movement in 1910 to the Scouts' contributions to the nation's war effort in the 1940s, to the growth of Scouting in the 2000s to serve 100,000 young people each year, this book provides a comprehensive history of the Northern Star Council's first 100 years.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways has Scouting changed over 100 years, and in what ways has it stayed the same?

2. What are the most important values that Scouting teaches young people?
3. What did you learn about Scouting that most interested or surprised you?
4. In what ways does *Honor Bright* portray a local and national history that reaches beyond the Northern Star Council?
5. What factors make it possible for an organization, such as the Northern Star Council, to remain in existence for 100+ years?
6. How might the process of researching and writing an organizational history be different from working on another type of history book?
7. The author had little direct experience with Scouting before beginning work on this book. How might his limited experience have been a help and/or disadvantage in researching and writing the book?
8. How did the photos and other images contribute to your enjoyment of the book and

understanding of the Northern Star Council's history? How well do you feel the text and images work together?

9. Are there ways in which we all are historians? What pieces of history do you keep alive, and how do you share this history with others?
10. If you wrote a history book about someone or something that had a profound influence on you as a youth, what would your topic be?

ABOUT DAVE KENNEY

Dave Kenney is a freelance writer specializing in Minnesota history. His books include Twin Cities Picture Show: A Century of Moviegoing and Minnesota Goes to War: The Home Front during World War II. Dave's award-winning textbook, Northern Lights, is used in elementary and middle school classrooms throughout the state.



Visit www.pastprologue.com to learn more about the author and his work.



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children's Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People's Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers' Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children's Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges' Sponsors:** Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; Saint Paul Almanac.

A CONVERSATION WITH CARY J. GRIFFITH

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I was writing an article for the *MN Conservation Volunteer* (in 2003, I believe), and I interviewed John Ackerman at his Spring Valley caverns cave farm as part of my research. He told me about his near-death experience trying to find the Odessa Spring cave, and I wondered about the type of person who would do this kind of exploration. Then, in April 2004, five kids entered the man-made caves in Saint Paul and only two came out alive. I wanted to know more about that story—because it was tragic, but it also explored an area of interest: what can happen when people without the proper background and perspective explore wilderness.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *Opening Goliath*?

The most interesting challenge was navigating the politics of the Minnesota caving community. John Ackerman is a particularly controversial character. Some people in the Minnesota caving community (and in the wider caving community)

hate him. And when they heard I was writing a book that featured some of his exploits, they were immediately turned off. And I don't mean just a little; some key figures refused to even speak with me—because they'd heard I was writing a book that was pro-Ackerman, which of course was not the case. But it was the kind of irrationality I faced from some in Minnesota's caving community.

What do you like most about the book?

Actually—and this is the truth—the fact that it won a Minnesota Book Award. While the book hasn't sold as well as I'd have liked, or been reviewed as widely as my first book, I think it's a well-written book. It opens the door to a part of wild Minnesota about which few people know. And it explores the characters who explore those regions. My publisher and I knew we put together a good book, but it wasn't until this award that we received some outside vindication for our efforts.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I was 18. When I was young, I lived a Huck Finn existence. I spent practically my entire summer exploring, fishing, trapping and wandering

Indian Creek and the rich wild wood of eastern Iowa. I entered college as a biology major, intent on doing some sort of work in forestry or something similar. But during my second year I took a required course—Introduction to Literature—and one evening, for an assignment, I read Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River*. I was transfixed, transported and broken open like an egg. I didn't have a lot of background in reading and writing, but I thought, "Now, here's something to which you could apply your life that would have particular meaning." I've been writing ever since.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

This is a wonderful community for writers and for the wild. Both are extremely important for my kind of work. Oh, and it's also full of readers, which of course are ultimately the most important people in the world for a writer.



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature

General Nonfiction

Genre Fiction

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

Minnesota

Novel & Short Story

Poetry

Young People's Literature

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: **651-366-6497.**

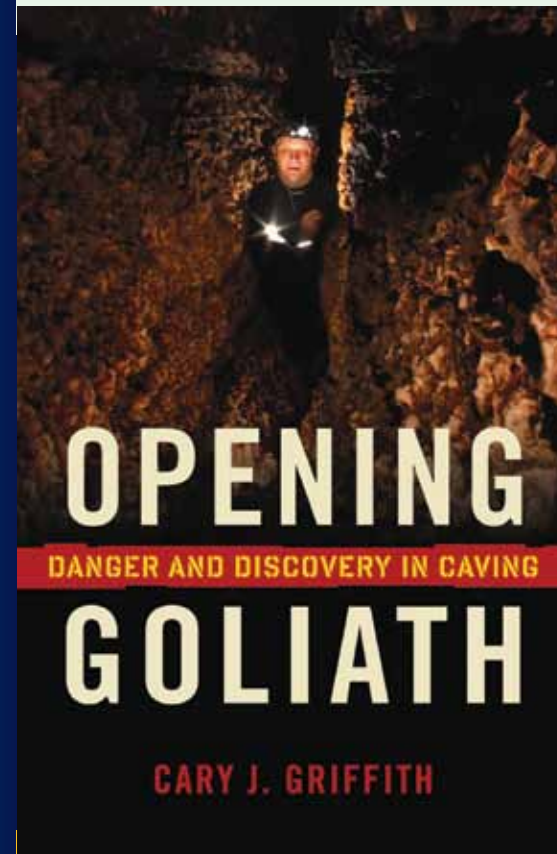
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL

MINNESOTA
BOOK AWARDS

Minnesota Winner

Sponsored by Xcel Energy



**Opening Goliath:
Danger and Discovery in Caving**

by Cary J. Griffith

BOREALIS BOOKS/MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS

Opening Goliath

SUMMARY:

Opening Goliath introduces readers to the challenges, rewards, and dangers of caving. Cary Griffith accomplishes this by recounting riveting and life-threatening tales of exploration in the limestone caves of southeastern Minnesota and the man-made caves of Saint Paul. With a mix of adventure, suspense, politics, science, discovery and wonder, the book takes readers to a subterranean wilderness where exploration and preservation sometimes coexist—and sometimes collide.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What did you learn about caving and Minnesota caves that was most surprising?
3. Are you interested in doing cave exploration? Did *Opening Goliath* make you more or less interested in the activity of caving, and why?
4. Some reviewers and readers have described the book as being a page-turning thriller. Do you agree with this description? How well does the author's writing style work for you in providing both an enjoyable and educational reading experience?
5. To what degree should state and federal government be allowed to control access to wild places? Should individuals be allowed to own natural caves?
6. In the controversy over the proper way to manage the exploration of Goliath's Cave, did you find yourself siding more with the cavers or the state officials? To what extent do you believe the cavers and government officials share a goal of conservation and/or other goals?
7. What words best describe John Ackerman? Are there particular qualities that you admire about him, and do you disagree with any of his actions described in the book?
8. Is there always value in humans going into previously unexplored wilderness, such as cave regions in southeastern Minnesota? When, if ever, do you believe it is better for humans to stay out of unexplored areas?
9. What is the most life-threatening thing you have chosen to do? What rewards and/or lessons did the experience provide?
10. If you wrote a nonfiction book about a Minnesota topic, what subject would you choose?

ABOUT CARY J. GRIFFITH

Cary J. Griffith is a freelance writer who specializes in writing about the outdoors. His previous book, Lost in the Wild: Danger and Survival in the North Woods, was published in 2006.



Visit www.caryjgriffith.com to learn more about the author's work and to view video taken in Goliath's Cave.

A CONVERSATION WITH KENT NERBURN

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

For many years I had been haunted by the sadness that I had seen on the faces of Indian elders when discussing their boarding school experiences. A chance encounter with a Native man in North Dakota set the book in motion when, speaking of his boarding school experience, he said, "I learned good English. I learned about being a good Christian. But I am no longer myself, I am someone else." I knew then that I had to tell the boarding school story, but with a light touch and an absolute fidelity to Native experience as I have experienced it.

What research did you undertake in writing *The Wolf at Twilight*?

I researched boarding school experiences in the U.S. and Canada in archives and libraries. I traveled throughout Minnesota and the Dakotas visiting boarding school sites, speaking to people, and listening to stories. Much of my research is related to direct experiences of people, weather, and the land.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

The biggest literary challenge was going back and finding the same voice that I had used

in the book's predecessor, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*, which won the Minnesota Book Award in 1995. That's a big gap to bridge in picking up a story. As to the narrative, the great challenge was to be absolutely faithful to the facts of the boarding school experience while bringing to life real people and placing them in a story that would captivate and educate readers, take them deep into reservation life, and show them both the darkness of the past and the humor and insight of the Native way of living and learning.

What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I was trained as a sculptor and still think as a sculptor, understanding everything visually rather than conceptually. I wrote all through college and graduate school as a way to make a meager living. I ran a community newspaper, wrote sports columns, and did art reviews and free-lance articles, all as ways to support my sculpting life. When an opportunity to direct an oral history project on the Red Lake Ojibwe reservation came along, I took it, and found that writing was a powerful artistic medium that I could use to express spiritual values. So I traded the chisel for the pen, and have never looked back.

How does being a native Minnesotan inform your writing?

I live in northern Minnesota, where the pines meet the prairies and the water changes course from south to north. Living in a land of transitions makes me alive to possibilities and multiple points of view. I am always aware of the turning of the seasons and feel the drumbeat of nature in all that I write. Most of my writings take place under open skies, not in rooms. And being in Bemidji, between three reservations, makes me acutely aware of the presence and possibility of the Native peoples of our state.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I love to travel, listen, and watch. I will always stop to have a conversation with a dog. I sit a lot, think a lot, listen to music a lot, and take great pleasure in having long conversations with my wife, my children, and strangers I meet on the street. I like to help other people.



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature
General Nonfiction
Genre Fiction
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
Minnesota Novel & Short Story
Poetry
Young People's Literature

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: 651-366-6497

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL

MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner

"Kent Nerburn's creative and compassionate book [is] humorous, heartwarming, and at times very sad. Thank you, Kent, for a good book to read."
— LEONARD FEEHAN, author, artist, and activist

the Wolf
at Twilight
An Indian Elder's Journey through
a Land of Ghosts and Shadows

Kent Nerburn

Author of *Neither Wolf nor Dog*
and *Chief Joseph and the Flight of the Nez Perce*

The Wolf at Twilight: An Indian Elder's Journey through a Land of Ghosts and Shadows

by Kent Nerburn

NEW WORLD LIBRARY

The Wolf at Twilight



SUMMARY:

Suspenseful, touching, humorous, tragic, and powerful are just some of the words that can be used to describe Kent Nerburn's captivating story of his journey to help an elderly Native American man discover what happened to his long-lost sister. Nerburn brings light to the complicated friendship between a white American and a Lakota Indian, and the reader is allowed a private and extraordinary glimpse into the life and wisdom of a tribal elder.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What did you learn from Dan's

thoughts about the Native way of teaching and seeing the world? Do those thoughts have application to our contemporary society?

3. What was the most interesting or disturbing thing you learned about Native American history and experiences in the Midwest?
4. The author is a non-Native. What is it about this book and its narrative technique that makes it acceptable for a non-Native writer to be writing about a Native American experience?
5. What role does the dog, Charles Bronson, play in the book and what lessons can be learned from this scruffy little dog?
6. How does humor play a role in the book, and how would your experience in reading it be different without the interjection of humor?
7. The author says that as the book's narrator, he has been accused, at various times, of being "whiney" as well as too docile and too easily pushed around. Do you share this feeling?
8. When asked, "Is this book true?" the author usually answers, "Are Van Gogh's paintings true? Are the Gospels true?" Is this a fair answer, and what does it mean?
9. Depending on the source, *The Wolf at Twilight* is

categorized as either creative nonfiction or fiction. In what category do you believe the book belongs? What distinguishes a memoir or biography from creative nonfiction, and what distinguishes creative nonfiction from fiction?

10. When it comes to documenting experiences, is there such thing as truth?

ABOUT KENT NERBURN

Kent Nerburn is the author of several books on spirituality and Native themes, including Chief Joseph and the Flight of the Nez Perce, which was featured on The History Channel. He has a Ph.D in Religious Studies and Art, and worked for many years as a sculptor before he switched to writing, a medium through which he realized he could reach more people. Kent was born and raised near Minneapolis and now lives in Bemidji with his wife.

Visit www.kentnerburn.com to learn more about the author and his work.



Photo by Scott Strebile



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children's Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People's Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers' Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children's Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges' Sponsors:** Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; Saint Paul Almanac.

A CONVERSATION WITH MARLON JAMES

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I'm still not sure how it happened. I've been obsessed with *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* for years, so that might have had something to do with it. (I used to carry around a copy of *Song of Solomon* all the time, just in case I met Toni Morrison). I also had lunch with an African poet two years ago, when I was between drafts, and we spoke about how matriarchal West African society was: how women decided when and where to plant crops—agricultural scientists, in every sense of the word—women who made the decision between abundance and starvation, and how the line of succession was always through the oldest daughter. This left me wondering, what if a group of women formed this kind of sisterhood, this power center on a sugar plantation, and what if nobody knew about it?

What research did you undertake in writing *The Book of Night Women*?

I was already familiar with quite a bit about slavery, having studied it from high school days. It's the defining event in Caribbean history, so you can't escape it even if you want to. Whether you're in history, cultural studies,

music or economics, slavery is the Diaspora's Genesis chapter. So, much of the history of slavery I already knew, but I still did a ton of research. History can be good at the what, when, where and even how, but not so much with the why. So I read slave narratives, master narratives, ship logs, tax records, pretty much everything—histories of fashion, costume archives, even weather patterns in the eighteenth century.

What do you like most about the novel?

Miss Isobel. She was the most interesting character to write, largely because all the contradictions of living in such a brutally formed colony are embodied in her.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *The Book of Night Women*?

It's hard staring in the face of atrocity. More so for the writer, who has a duty to all his characters, even the ones he doesn't like personally. Writing about any cruel event costs you. You can write about slavery, or the holocaust or the Armenian genocide, but it will cost you. You can get lost in all that death and live a sort of death yourself. Or you can get so caught up in history that you forget

that the world you just wrote about is behind you.

How long did it take to write the book?

18 Months. I had to or I wouldn't have graduated.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Cycling. Thank god I live in the greatest cycling city in America. In fact I live in two of them.



325 Cedar Street
Suite 555
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-3242

www.thefriends.org

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

Children's Literature
General Nonfiction
Genre Fiction
Memoir & Creative Nonfiction
Minnesota Novel & Short Story
Poetry
Young People's Literature

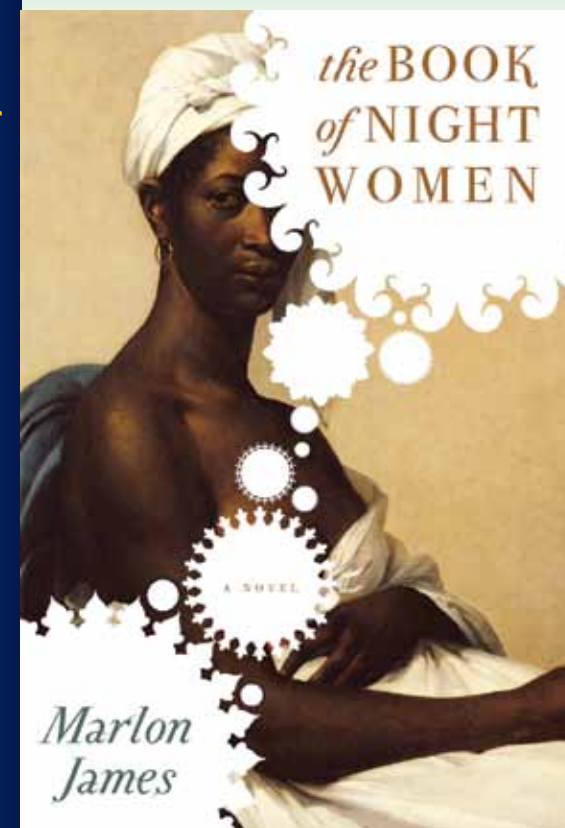
The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library, and is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). For additional information, please call: 651-366-6497

A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/ The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

22ND ANNUAL

MINNESOTA
BOOK AWARDS

Novel & Short Story Winner



The Book of Night Women
by Marlon James

RIVERHEAD BOOKS/PENGUIN GROUP

The Book of Night Women

SUMMARY:

This sweeping and astonishing novel tells the story of Lilith, a slave on a Jamaican sugar plantation who possesses a dark power. A group of slaves who call themselves the “Night Women” are plotting a revolt and assume Lilith’s powers will be the key to its success. However, as Lilith begins to assume her identity, she chooses a different path which poses a threat to the conspiracy. *The Book of Night Women* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What cultural and historical insights did you gain from reading the book? What did you find were the main differences between slavery in Jamaica and slavery in the American South, and how are those differences reflected in the novel?
2. Throughout the novel, the author moves between British English and Jamaican patois. What effect, if any, does the switch in language have on the narrative? What are the challenges and rewards to reading the patois?
3. Do you believe Lilith actually possessed a dark power different from most people? If so, how do you describe that power and how did Lilith acquire it? Could it be said that all humans have the potential to use a dark power?
4. In what instances are the destruction and violence committed by the slaves in the book justified? Are the non-slaves’ acts of destruction and violence ever justified? How did these actions affect your understanding of slavery?
5. The author describes Miss Isobel as his favorite character to write. Why do you think this was? Discuss the social position of a young white woman raised in the colonies as portrayed in the novel. In what ways is Miss Isobel equally as enslaved as Lilith?
6. What do you think of the book’s ending? How would the book conclude if you wrote the ending?
7. Why do you think the author chose to show the dark side of all his characters? Describe the good and the bad that you saw in each of these characters: Lilith, Miss Isobel, Jack Wilkins, Homer, Massa Humphrey, and Robert Quinn. For which of these characters and/or other characters in the book does good prevail?
8. What is the significance of Lilith and Robert Quinn’s affair? Is it fair to describe *The Book of Night Women* as “ultimately a love story”? Discuss how love manifests itself in the various relationships portrayed throughout the book.
9. How does Lilith change over the course of the book? What factors shape the person she becomes?
10. *The Book of Night Women* is written from a female perspective by a male writer. Discuss the challenges Marlon James might have faced writing from a female point of view. How might this story be different if it were told from a male perspective? Could this book have been written by a woman, and if so, how might the characters and the story be different?

ABOUT MARLON JAMES

Marlon James was born in Kingston, Jamaica. His first novel, *John Crow’s Devil*, was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Prize and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Marlon lives in Saint Paul and is a professor of literature and creative writing at Macalester College.



Photo by Scott Strebile



The 22nd Annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. **Presenting Sponsor:** RBC Wealth Management. **Foundation Supporters:** The Boss Foundation; Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts; Huss Foundation; The Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation. **Grants:** City of Saint Paul – Cultural STAR Program; Minnesota Department of Education – State Library Services. **Category Sponsors:** Children’s Literature – Books For Africa; General Nonfiction – Minnesota AFL-CIO; Genre Fiction – Wellington Management, Inc.; Minnesota – Xcel Energy; Young People’s Literature – 3M Company. **Special Award Sponsors:** Book Artist – Minnesota Center for Book Arts; Kay Sexton Award – Common Good

Books; Readers’ Choice – Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com. **Community Sponsors:** Anchor Trust; Minnesota Crime Wave; Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association Children’s Fund; The Red Balloon Bookshop. **Judges’ Sponsors:** Beaver’s Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Lerner Publishing; Milkweed Editions. **Media Partners:** Minnesota Public Radio (MPR); Pioneer Press and TwinCities.com; Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN); Swank AV; Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) – Minnesota Channel. **Outreach Partners:** The Loft Literary Center; Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA); Minnesota Educational Media Organization; Minnesota Library Foundation; *Saint Paul Almanac*.