



## Book *Woman of Troublesome Creek* (Richardson)

[Summary](#) | [Author Bio](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Discussion Questions](#) | [Full Version](#) | [Print](#)

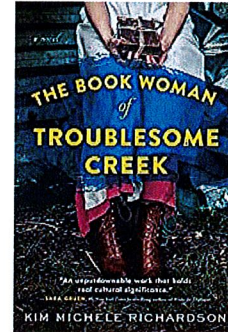
### *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*

Kim Michele Richardson, 2019

Sourcebooks

320 pp.

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### Summary

The hardscrabble folks of Troublesome Creek have to scrap for everything—everything except books, that is. Thanks to Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome's got its very own traveling librarian, Cussy Mary Carter.

Cussy's not only a book woman, however, she's also the last of her kind, her skin a shade of blue unlike most anyone else.

Not everyone is keen on Cussy's family or the Library Project, and a Blue is often blamed for any whiff of trouble. If Cussy wants to bring the joy of books to the hill folks, she's going to have to confront prejudice as old as the Appalachias and suspicion as deep as the holler.

Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930s, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's belief that books can carry us anywhere—even back home. (*From the book.*)

### Author Bio

Kim Michele Richardson is the author of a memoir and several novels; her most recent, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, was published in 2019.

Richardson lives with her family in Kentucky. She has spent years visiting nearly every cranny in the state—its rural areas, deep woodlands, and rolling hills—sussing out stories of the people, their histories, and traditions, as well as the hardships and social injustices endured. As Richardson writes on her website:

*I write human stories set in a unique landscape. Knowing one small piece of this world, the earth, the sky, the plants, the people and the very air of it—helps us understand the sufferings and joys of others —ourselves.*

In addition to her writing, Richardson has found time to volunteer by building houses for Habitat for Humanity. She is also an advocate for the prevention of child abuse and domestic violence, partnering with the U.S. Navy globally to bring awareness and education to the prevention of domestic violence.

In 2018-19 Richardson undertook the construction of a small house to serve as a base for a new residency program to help budding writers. The residency, "Shy Rabbit," began operations in the summer of 2019. In addition to the Kentucky site, Shy Rabbit will offer "scholarships and a food stipend several times during the year to writers anywhere."

### **Books**

Richardson's memoir, *The Unbreakable Child*, detailing her own experience with child abuse, was released in 2009. Her novels include, *Liar's Bench* (2015), *Godpretty in the Tobacco Field* (2016), *The Sisters of Glass Ferry* (2017), and *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* (2019) about the Kentucky Packhorse librarians who, under the auspices of the Federal WPA, carried books to far flung regions during the Great Depression.

Richardson also writes for Huffington Post and is a book critic for the New York Journal of Books. (Adapted from online sources, including the [author's website](#).)

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### **Book Reviews**

[A] gem.... In 1936, 19-year-old Cussy Mary Carter works for the... Pack Horse Library Project, delivering reading material to the rural people of Kentucky.... Readers will adore the memorable Cussy and appreciate [the] fine rendering of rural Kentucky life.

### ***Publishers Weekly***

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, Washington & Lee Lib., Lexington, VA*

### ***Library Journal***

Readers will respond to quiet Cussy's steel spine.... And book groups who like to explore lesser-known aspects of American history will be fascinated.

### ***Booklist***

Richardson has penned an emotionally moving and fascinating story about the power of literacy over bigotry, hatred and fear.

### ***BookPage***

With a focus on the personal joy and broadened horizons that can result from access to reading material, this well-researched tale serves as a solid history lesson on 1930s Kentucky. A unique story about Appalachia and the healing power of the written word.

### ***Kirkus Reviews***

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#### **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 antiscegenation 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?

*(Questions found on the [author's website](#).)*

[top of page \(summary\)](#)