

BLACK STORM COMIN'

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2008 Grades 6-8

Submitted by Frederick Savoy Jr., Graduate Student, LSU School of Library & Information Science, (Professor; Dr. Margie Thomas); and Stephanie Brown, Student, University of Louisiana at Lafayette (Instructor: Dorothy Grimsley)

Black Storm Comin' by Diane Lee Wilson. Simon and Schuster, 2005. 291 pages.

Summary

In 1860, the Westcott family had joined a wagon train in the hopes of making it to California where they could start a new life, but the other people on the wagon train do not want anything to do with a mixed-race family. When twelve-year-old Colton is accidentally shot by his white father, the man runs away, leaving wounded Colton to take care of his African American mother and his two sisters. They are forced to leave the wagon train and make their way to a town in Nevada. Colton struggles to keep the family alive and together. Even though he is underage, he manages to get a job as a Pony Express rider to earn some money. What was already his life of hardship becomes a life of incredible challenges and harrowing brushes with death. Colton can trust nobody. Even his sister turns against him, because she thinks he is abandoning the family. He rides across the treacherous snow-covered Sierra Nevada Mountains to Sacramento, California. The journey is more than an attempt to save one family; it becomes instrumental in the entire course of the Civil War.

Read an excerpt: <http://www.simonsays.com/content/book.cfm?tab=1&pid=507070&agid=2>

Awards and “Best Book” Lists

Booklist Editors' Choice
NYPL “Books for the Teen Age”
CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book
Spur Award (Western Writers of America)
VOYA- Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers
Top 10 Black History Books for Youth 2006; Booklist
Top 10 Historical Fiction Books for Youth 2006; Booklist

Author's Biography

Diane Lee Wilson lives in San Diego. She says that she “has been in love with horses since the age of three.” She spent her childhood reading and fantasizing about horses and taking weekly riding lessons. When she became a teenager, her parents gave her a horse and she has always owned one since. When she is not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family and pet cat.

Other Titles by Diane Lee Wilson

I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade
To Ride the God's Own Stallion
Firehorse

Related Titles

Clem's Chances by Sonia Levitin.
If You Traveled West In a Covered Wagon by Ellen Levine.
Jo's Triumph by Nikki Tate.
The Pony Express: A Photographic History by Jan and Bill Moeller.
Riding the Pony Express by Deborah Kent.

Classroom Connections

- **Pony Express**
 - Have the students research the Pony Express route. An excellent lesson plan can be found on Houghton Mifflin's Education Place site: <http://eduplace.com/ss/hmss/4/unit/act4.2.html>
 - Incorporate the Pony Express into a math lesson by using Houghton Mifflin's Education Place site: http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/gen_act/travel/pony.html
 - Have the students make a time line documenting all of the events that were occurring in history during the same time as the Pony Express.
 - Ask the students to list some of the benefits of being a Pony Express rider, such as good pay. (Explain what average wages would have been at the time.) Have the students list some of the dangers, such as Indian attacks and robbery. Ask the students what may have led a young man to choose this occupation. (The goal is to give the students an understanding of how difficult survival in the old west was.)
- **Pioneers**
 - Share with the students the story of the American pioneers by using pictures, historical facts and reading aloud stories of pioneer children.
 - Have students research life on a pioneer wagon train.
 - Have students write a fictitious journal entry from the viewpoint of a pioneer child.
- **Civil War**
 - Have students research the Civil War.
 - Have discussions about racism and slavery and how the color of a person's skin may determine how they live in society.

Web Sites

Proteacher

<http://www.proteacher.com/090090.shtml>

This is a list of numerous web sites with lesson plans about the Pony Express.

Thinkquest! Pioneers

<http://library.thinkquest.org/6400/default.htm>

This is an excellent source of basic information about pioneers.

Social Studies WebQuest: The Oregon Trail

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/webquest/ushist/oregon.htm>

This includes information, ideas, and links related to the Oregon Trail.

Teaching Children 19th century United States History with Timelines Part 2: 1850-1899

<http://inquiryunlimited.org/timelines/hist1851.html>

Detailed description of significant events in United States history broken down by year.