

## WORTH

### Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 3-5

Submitted by Roxanne Ravey, Graduate Student, School of Library and Information Science, LSU (Professor: Dr. Margie Thomas); and Tonya Bufford, Student, University of Louisiana at Lafayette (Instructor: Dorothy Grimsley)

**Worth** by A. LaFaye. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2004. 160 p.

#### Summary

*Worth* is set in nineteenth-century Nebraska and centers on eleven-year-old Nathaniel Peal, who feels cast aside after an accident leaves him unable to help his father with the daily work on the family farm. Nate's inability to work prompts his father to take in John Worth, a boy from the orphan train. Nate's mother despises John, and Nate cannot bear to look at him. John is treated like a slave. Both boys must struggle with trying to gain the approval of Nate's father. Nate is permanently disabled and has never learned to read. John, on the other hand, is a hard worker and reads well. Eventually, Nate and John become friends and save the town in an exciting climax. The Peale family begins to view John Worth as their own son.

Told in a bitterly honest, first-person narrative from Nathaniel's point of view, *Worth* conveys the almost tangible tension felt by the family as it teeters precariously on the brink of financial ruin during the range wars (conflicts between cattle ranchers and farmers) that flared almost constantly throughout the era.

#### Awards

Booklist Editor's Choice  
Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction

#### Author's Biography

The "A" in A. LaFaye stands for Alexandria. She has lived in Wisconsin, Virginia, Tennessee, Illinois, and New York. She now resides in Arkansas. Her first book, *Phantom on the Terrace*, about a group of girls who investigated haunted houses, was handwritten. *The Year of the Sawdust Man* and its sequel, *Nissa's Place* are set in Louisiana. Alexandria's grandfather is from New Orleans. She enjoys gardening and has four pets: two cats, Ian and Simon, and two dogs, Oliver and Nigel.

<http://www.alafaye.com/>

#### Other Titles by A. LaFaye

*The Year of the Sawdust Man*  
*Nissa's Place*  
*The Strength of Saints*  
*Edith Shay*  
*Strawberry Hill*  
*Dad, In Spirit*

## Related Titles

### Orphans

*Brideship* by Joan Weir.

*In the Face of Danger* by Joan Lowery Nixon.

*Holding Up the Earth* by Dianne E. Gray.

*Rodzina* by Karen Cushman.

*Thunder from the Sea* by Joan Hiatt Harlow. (LYRC 2007 Gr. 3-5 Ballot)

*Walker's Crossing* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor.

## Classroom Connections

### **Tracie Vaughn Zimmer: *Worth: A Teacher's Guide*.**

See the web site: <http://www.tracievaughnzimmer.com/> for "*Worth: A Teacher's Guide*" for discussion questions and projects across the curriculum.

## Language Arts

- Have students design newspaper articles based on the story. Headlines may include the following: "Peale Boy Caught Under Wagon," "Fence Cutters Strike," and "Entire Peale Farm and Many Other Farms Destroyed."

## History

- Have the students research orphan trains, pioneer life, homesteading and farming in the late 1800s.
- Use a Venn diagram to compare/contrast farming in the late 1800s and farming today.
- Students can pretend that they are pioneers or orphans who rode on the orphan trains (they can divide up in small groups or individually). They will write a letter to a friend or a relative in the East describing their life as a pioneer or an orphan.
- Have the students do research to compare and contrast modern-day travel experiences with travel experiences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Science/Health

- Have the students do research to compare and contrast modern-day medical science and medical science in the late 1800s.

## Art

- Have the student study lithographic prints and learn to create prints.

## Web Links

### Author and Book

#### **A. LaFaye: Author and Educator**

<http://www.alafaye.com/>

Author's site contains a list of her books, a biography, contact information, and literary links.

**California Kids! April, 2004 “Alexandria LaFaye”**

<http://www.patriciamnewman.com/lafaye.html>

This article provides interesting details about the author A. LaFaye and her books.

**Children’s Literature Network: A LaFaye**

<http://www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/authors/lafaye.html>

This excellent children’s literature web site includes a biography, list of books with summaries and awards.

**SimonSays.com (Simon & Schuster)**

<http://www.simonsays.com/content/destination.cfm?sid=183&pid=356422>

Publisher’s site links to Tracie Vaughn Zimmer’s printable study guide.

**Lithography**

**Color Printing in the Nineteenth Century: Lithography**

<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/color/lithogr.htm>

The University of Delaware site describes the art of lithography.

**History**

**Eyewitness To History: Ranchers and Farmers**

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/butcher.htm>

“Ranchers and Farmers Collide in Nebraska, 1884.” This true account by Solomon D. Butcher describes a raid on a fence by settlers. This is quite similar to the events that are described in *Worth*.

**Nebraska State Historical Society: Solomon D. Butcher: Photographs of the Nebraska Homestead Experience**

[www.nebraskahistory.org/index.htm](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/index.htm)

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/photos/highlite/butcher/photos.htm>

Excellent historical photographs.

**Pioneer Life in America**

<http://library.thinkquest.org/J001587/>

This is a very kid-friendly, interactive site about pioneer life: hardships, life, and towns of the pioneer. Activities include crossword puzzles, a word search, a math activity and a quiz.