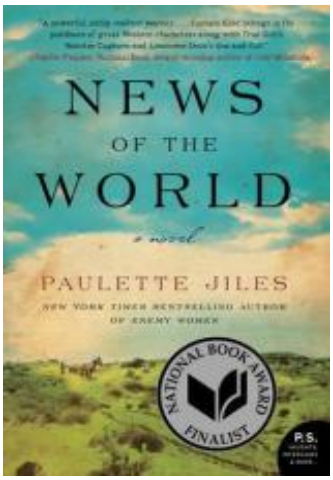
News of the World

by Paulette Jiles



About the Book

It is 1870 and Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd travels through northern Texas, giving live readings to paying audiences hungry for news of the world. An elderly widower who has lived through three wars and fought in two of them, the captain enjoys his rootless, solitary existence.

In Wichita Falls, he is offered a $50 gold piece to deliver a young orphan to her relatives in San Antonio. Four years earlier, a band of Kiowa raiders killed Johanna?s parents and sister; sparing the little girl, they raised her as one of their own. Recently rescued by the U.S. army, the 10-year-old has once again been torn away from the only home she knows.

Their 400-mile journey south through unsettled territory and unforgiving terrain proves difficult and at times dangerous. Johanna has forgotten the English language, tries to escape at every opportunity, throws away her shoes, and refuses to act ?civilized.? Yet as the miles pass, the two lonely survivors tentatively begin to trust each other, forging a bond that marks the difference between life and death in this treacherous land.

Arriving in San Antonio, the reunion is neither happy nor welcome. The captain must hand Johanna over to an aunt and uncle she does not remember --- strangers who regard her as an unwanted burden. A respectable man, Captain Kidd is faced with a terrible choice: abandon the girl to her fate or become --- in the eyes of the law --- a kidnapper himself. Exquisitely rendered and morally complex, News of the World is a brilliant work of historical fiction that explores the boundaries of family, responsibility, honor and trust.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd?s work as a newspaper reader. What does he bring to his audience, and what does he gain from his work besides financial compensation?

2. Why does Kidd accept the difficult job of returning Johanna home? What drives him to complete the job despite the danger and obstacles?

3. Why do you think Johanna wants to stay with her Kiowa family? What do you think she remembers of her life before she was taken?

4. What connects Kidd to Johanna? Why does she seem to trust him so easily?

5. What does Kidd worry may become of Johanna once she?s returned to her family? What does he know of the fate of other ?returned captives??

6. Doris Dillion says that Johanna is ?carried away on the flood of the world...not real and not not-real.? She describes her as having ?been through two creations? and ?forever falling.? Do you agree with her assessment? Does Johanna remain this way through the course of the novel?

7. Discuss the various tensions in the novel: Indians and whites; soldiers and civilizations; America?s recent past and its unsure future. In what ways do these tensions underlie the story of Kidd and Johanna?

8. Imagine the perspective of Johanna?s Kiowa family. Why, do you think, they would?ve taken her in and raise her? Why would they give her up? How do you think they felt when they let her go?

9. Discuss the troubling moment when Johanna wanted to scalp her fallen enemy. How did that make you feel about her?

10. Partway through his journey with Johanna, Kidd feels as though he was ?drawn back into the stream of being because there was once again life in his hands.? What do you think this means? What does it tell you about Kidd?s emotional life?

Author Bio

A novelist, poet and memoirist, Paulette Jiles was the author of a memoir, COUSINS, and the novels ENEMY WOMEN, STORMY WEATHER, THE COLOR OF LIGHTNING, LIGHTHOUSE ISLAND, SIMON THE FIDDLER, CHENNEVILLE and NEWS OF THE WORLD, the latter of which was a finalist for the 2016 National Book Award. Jiles passed away on July 8, 2025 at the age of 82.

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