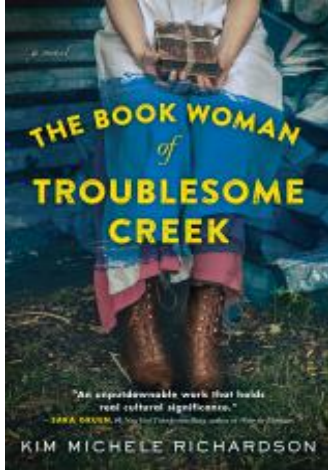


The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek

by Kim Michele Richardson



About the Book

The hardscrabble folks of Troublesome Creek have to scarp for everything --- everything except books, that is. Thanks to Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome has 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.

Discussion Guide

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 booklover 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 hillfolk 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 antimiscegenation 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?

Author Bio

A native-born Kentuckian, Kim Michele Richardson is the *New York Times*, *L.A. Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author who has written six novels, a memoir and, most recently, two children's picture books. The works have been published in more than 18 languages, and she is a two-time Southern Book Prize finalist.

Her novel *THE BOOK WOMAN OF TROUBLESOME CREEK* is taught widely in high schools and college classrooms and has been adopted as a Common Read selection by states, cities and colleges across the country and abroad, and was a Favorite Read by Dolly Parton in *People*.

Kim Michele was inducted into the Kentucky Women's Remembers Exhibit in 2025 by Gov. Andy Beshear for her contributions to Kentucky, and was awarded a Doctorate in Humanities from Eastern Kentucky University. She lives with her family in Kentucky and is the founder of Shy Rabbit, a writers residency, and a literacy initiative, *Courthouses Reading Across Kentucky & Beyond*

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