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Nightjohn



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Synopsis

"To know things, for us to know things, is bad for them. We get to wanting and when we get to wanting it's bad for them. They thinks we want what they got . . . That's why they don't want us reading." --Nightjohn "I didn't know what letters was, not what they meant, but I thought it might be something I wanted to know. To learn." -- Sarny Sarny, a female slave at the Waller plantation, first sees Nightjohn when he is brought there with a rope around his neck, his body covered in scars. He had escaped north to freedom, but he came back--came back to teach reading. Knowing that the penalty for reading is dismemberment Nightjohn still returned to slavery to teach others how to read. And twelve-year-old Sarny is willing to take the risk to learn. Set in the 1850s, Gary Paulsen's groundbreaking new novel is unlike anything else the award-winning author has written. It is a meticulously researched, historically accurate, and artistically crafted portrayal of a grim time in our nation's past, brought to light through the personal history of two unforgettable characters.

Book Information

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[Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Imagine being beaten for learning to read, shackled and whipped for learning a few letters of the alphabet. Now, imagine a man brave enough to risk torture in order to teach others how to read; his name is Nightjohn, and he sneaks into the slave camps at night to teach other slaves how to read

and write. Celebrated author Gary Paulsen writes a searing meditation on why the ability to read and write is radical, empowering, and so necessary to our freedom. These skills threaten our oppressors because they allow us to communicate--to learn the real status of our slavery and to seek liberation. In this tightly written, painful, joyous little novel is a key that may unlock the power of reading for even the most reluctant teens.

Among the most powerful of Paulsen's works (*Hatchet* ; *The Winter Room* ; *Dogsong*), this impeccably researched novel sheds light on cruel truths in American history as it traces the experiences of a 12-year-old slave girl in the 1850s. Narrator Sarny exposes the abuse (routine beatings, bondage, dog attacks, forced "breeding") suffered by her people on the Waller plantation. The punishment for learning to read and write, she knows, is a bloody one, but when new slave Nightjohn offers to teach her the alphabet, Sarny readily agrees. Her decision causes pain for others as well as for herself, yet, inspired by the bravery of Nightjohn, who has given up a chance for freedom in order to educate slaves, Sarny continues her studies. Convincingly written in dialect, this graphic depiction of slavery evokes shame for this country's forefathers and sorrow for the victims of their inhumanity. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

One of my favorite ways to teach history is through making connections between historic fictions and non-fiction books. Gary Paulsen has done an excellent job with drawing the reader in and holding their attention. This is one of the most moving books for this time in history. The kids get totally involved emotionally as I read it aloud. Great class discussion pursue with lots of critical thinking. This is a must have book for a classroom library but of course pretty much all of Gary Paulsen books are.

Written by Chyna, age 11
The book *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen is about a girl named Sarny who is enslaved on a plantation. She is raised by Delie (Mammy). A man named NightJohn who is also enslaved on the same plantation started to teach Sarny how to read and write. This was important to him because he wanted enslaved people to be able to write about their slave experience. Even though educated slaves aren't supposed to teach others, NightJohn took that risk and taught her secretly. I gave this book five stars because this book teaches you about slavery and about what enslaved people had to experience and go through. Also, I felt intrigued reading this book because it taught me about my ancestors in an entertaining

way. It was entertaining because Gary Paulsen made up fictional characters to excite kids or other readers through the characters. The characters are charismatic personalities. 5th graders or ages 10 and up should read this book because they are able to handle the shocking and disturbing events properly. Also, students this age are able to hear and visualize challenging things. Younger kids would not be able to handle the disturbing or shocking events.

My children are in their 30/s now and I discovered the movie on VHS when my children were preteens. This was my youngest son favorite movie as a child and he still love it to this day. And he now shares this movie with his 6 year old son instilling in him the love for reading. Now, when i discover the book, I just had to get it, read it in one day and it was exact onpoint like the movie. Every household should have the movie or the book or both as I do. It truly points out the importance of a MUST for reading and having an education.

This book was surprisingly short, finished it in one day, unusual of me, but the story I'll never forget, bringing back the title, it is verrrry terrifying and very dark. Highly recommended PG13 though I'm 12 and reading this as a summer book, READ AT YOUR OWN RISK

What I like about this book is the character called John. He helps out other workers and teach them how to read and write. It's very wonderful how this story is based on true events...it shows that this person, nightjohn, is a very generous and caring person. :)

A great book to understand the terror faced by Black Americans in the United States

Teaching a college level course in Content Area Reading, I use this book as an example of historical fiction to supplement history lessons on the Civil War and Slavery. It shows the life of young children and teens living in slave camps.....the students that I teach really get into it and create wonderful lessons using it as their main reading source.

Every person, 10 years and older, should read this book. It helps you understand how really rough slavery in the USA really was. And although it's a novel, it's based on a true incident. Please read this one, and the novel Sarny, also by the same author. The book, Sarny, is a sequel to Nightjohn.

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