



The Secret River

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings , Leo Dillon (Illustrator) , Diane Dillon (Illustrator)

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Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings + Leo and Diane Dillon = pure magic!

A depression era story that is just as timely as it is enchanting, this is a stunning picture book for the ages.

There's just not enough not enough money, not enough food, not enough fish for her daddy to sell at the market. Hard times have come to the forest, but Calpurnia wants to turn them back into soft times. With her little dog Buggy Horse and a tip from old Mother Albirtha, the wisest person in the forest, Calpurnia finds a secret river and uses the pink paper roses from her hair to catch enough beautiful catfish to feed the whole swamp land with some left over for Daddy to sell. When she tries to find the river again the next day, Mother Albirtha tells her, sometimes a thing happens once, and does not ever happen anymore. You caught catfish when catfish were needed; you will not find the river again. This story by the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Yearling* and literary icon Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is about living in a time of want, yet it is overflowing with riches&, stunning language, mystical happenings, wondrous, wondrous artwork. Beautiful in all ways that a book can be beautiful, this unforgettable picture book is a classic in the making.

The Secret River Details

Date : Published January 4th 2011 by Atheneum Books for Young Readers (first published 1955)

ISBN : 9781416911791

Author : Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings , Leo Dillon (Illustrator) , Diane Dillon (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Secret River for online ebook

Mary Jo Garcia-Brown says

This is a classic by the renowned author, Marjorie Kinnans Rawlings. I'd never seen the book before so was intrigued. It was a profoundly beautiful tale of a young girl who decides to help her father whose business has been stricken by the Great Depression. With a little magic and a lot of imagination, she makes a miracle happen. I found myself near tears at points in this book, perhaps because the child is so selfless, her intentions so pure. The illustrations are equally magical, reflecting the exotic mystery of the Florida forests and wetlands.

Tricia Douglas says

After reading the wonderful book by Kris Radish called A Grand Day to Get Lost which revolved around the life of Marjorie Rawlings (winner of the Pulitzer for The Yearling), I became infatuated with Rawling's life. I found The Secret River which was the only book Rawlings wrote specifically for children. The copy I read was beautifully written with gorgeous illustrations by the talented Dillon artists. The story is written like a folktale. A young girl wants to find the secret river so she can catch as many fish as she can. In this way she can help feed the poor people in her town and help make the 'hard times' soft again. A beautiful book for my bookshelf and one that I will read many times.

Dolly says

This is a wonderful tale, accompanied by gorgeous illustrations for this 2011 reprint of the classic Newbery Honor story. The story is heartwarming, with a young girl who finds a way to contribute to her family that ends up helping a whole community.

The illustrations are so expressive and magical, we found ourselves just pausing our reading of the tale and staring at them, pointing out the different things we saw. This is a book that deserves a second look once you have read the story.

Go back and take another look at the pictures and marvel at the details that you may have missed the first time. We did. This is a long story, so recommend breaking this story up into parts if read to younger children.

This book was featured as one of the selections for the June 2015 Rivers and Lakes-themed reads for the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Cheryl says

One my all-time favorites. Just before picking up this univ. copy for a reread, I discovered that it was

published posthumously, and wondered if there's a story behind that.

There is! And it's explained in an introduction, in the book itself. Apparently Rawlings wanted to see if she could write a whole book about Calpurnia, but her 'untimely death' made it possible for this to get illustrated and released.

When I was a child, one of the things that I loved most about this story was the idea of 'follow your nose.' I was just beginning to understand metaphor, and so enjoyed the idea both literally and metaphorically. If turning to look at interesting sights, towards interesting sounds, could really lead to adventures, to secret places, I was all for it!

I also admired Calpurnia's courage. I had no sense of my own bravery, but since she showed what someone was capable of, I felt more confident myself.

And of course the note on the little red boat: "Please tie me up again when you are through with me. I am so afraid of getting lost" is delightful. The idea of sharing, and trust, enchants.

This time I noticed that we never see Calpurnia's face. We almost do when she's still asleep in her little bed, but elsewhere she's turned at least 1/2-way away from us. We see what she sees. We look beyond her nose.... Also, we are left to imagine that she's non-white... she could be of Florida Indian, or Mexican, or African descent. We don't see her parents, either. I agree with Weisgard's choices to illustrate the book that way.

A treasure of a book. I'm so lucky to have known it as a child, as an adult, and to also know the Dillon's version. The Dillon's is colorful, picture-book size, and does show the family clearly as African-American. But in their case, that's a good choice, too.

Kathryn says

I loved almost everything about this book! (And I don't love fishing; but I certainly appreciate and understand its necessity in cases such as this.)

Calpurnia is a wonderful heroine; bright, brave, resourceful, kindhearted, and intuitive. I adore her poems! I love her kindness to *all* animals, even those that others would deem too scary or dangerous. Buggy-horse is such a charming companion for her adventures. I especially appreciate stories where children help adults in trying times and this story shines in that regard. It's written in such a beautiful, soulful way, with such wisdom, too. Some of the lines are just great: "[Calpurnia's] mother was very considerate and did not ask questions unless she had to." ;-)

My version is illustrated by Leo & Diane Dillon. I'm a big fan of their work and it's just luminous here. The setting feels so real, yet magical. Calpurnia's expressions are just perfect and the river is suitably magical. The layout is great, too--the shock at turning the page and seeing the frightening animals in the night (for example) or when Calpurnia, looking oh-so-small at the bottom of one page, looks up at the enormous owl who takes up the entire opposite page.

The story (already abridged from the Newbery Honor-winning original) is rather long for the younger picture book crowd, but this story is one I'm adding to my personal collection to share with my son when he's older.

Josiah says

I haven't read the original version of *The Secret River*, which the afterward to this edition says is "slightly longer", but I definitely do plan on reading it someday. Leonard Weisgard's illustrations for the story must be some incredible sight to see, and I'm sure well worth the effort required to track down a used copy of the book. This is the new edition I'm reviewing here, however, and so I will focus on what I saw from this version.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is an author nonpareil. She worked wonders in her emotionally haunting presentation of *The Yearling*, and has done a beautiful job again with *The Secret River*, albeit in a much shorter space. The story is of a small, loving family in backwoods Florida (the same area used so evocatively as the setting for *The Yearling*) during a time of local economic depression. Calpurnia, the family's young daughter, is concerned about the future of her father's business selling fish when people just don't have enough money to be buying. She wants to do something real to help, so she goes to ask a woman named Mother Albirtha—who happens to have second sight—if there's anything that she herself can do to make the times less stressful for her parents.

Well, Mother Albirtha has something really good to tell Calpurnia. There is a secret river in the forest around somewhere, and Calpurnia can find it if she'll just "follow (her) nose". That secret river is just filled with perfect game fish, Mother Albirtha says, enough to pull their part of Florida out of the economic dumps and set them all right smack in the middle of softer times.

Delighted to hear this, Calpurnia embarks on a trip to locate the river full of fish, and she isn't going to leave until she's changed the fortunes of her family and all their neighbors who have been hurting for money so badly. What she watches unfold in the river's part of the woods is like a vision from a pleasant dream, but the dream becomes reality when it turns out that she has brought back enough fish to set things right again around home for a long time. This is some special river, indeed, a place that she will want to return to often for the rest of her life.

The truth of the secret river that Mother Albirtha explains to Calpurnia after she comes home, about why it's the type of place that one can't ever go back to after that first enchanting visit, is the thread by which this mystical story leads back to reality. When Calpurnia was at her lowest, when she wasn't sure how her family was even going to make it by, she *needed* that secret river; not wanted, but *needed* it. I think of the times in my own life when I *needed* something as special and unique as a secret river to help me out, and when that something (or someone) actually came along for me, what an experience it was for however long I had it. A day, a month, half a year, or maybe even longer than that. But those kinds of sudden miraculous provisions, they don't usually last forever. And the heartache of losing them is real, and feels like it hurts as much as the predicament we were in before. The truth is, though, like Mother Albirtha tells Calpurnia, "The secret river is in your mind... You can go there any time you want to. In your mind. Close your eyes, and you will see it." We're better off for having experienced that blessed provision, even if it may hurt too much right now to understand that. But I wouldn't trade my remembrances of the past times for anything, ever.

All in all, *The Secret River* is an emotionally resounding story that lives up to the author's reputation for greatness in literature. In its Newbery year, 1956, I can't see any book other than Jean Lee Latham's powerful *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* actually winning the Newbery Medal, but in my opinion *The Secret River* was a fully deserving Newbery Honor recipient for that year; in fact, I feel comfortable saying that it's one of the

most deserving Honor books of the whole 1950s decade. No matter who's providing the illustrations, this is a story worthy of attention and acclaim in any generation, and I loved it. If you read it, I'm sure you will, too.

Linda Lipko says

This is a re-issued book of the author's 1956 Newbery honor award winning book of the same title.

In lush illustrations, the story of Calpurnia and her dog Buggy-horse unfolds. Deep in the dark forest of Florida is a community reliant on each other. If one fails, like a domino they are all impacted.

Hard times occurred in the forest. The rivers carrying fish for Calpurnia's father to sell have all gone dry. Hard times hit harder for poor people.

Calpurnia wondered how she could possibly help her father and their community.

Remembering a small pond where she and her dog fished unsuccessfully, she thought that perhaps fish would bite the line of something pretty, instead of worms. Folding pink roses, she visited wise Mother Albirtha for guidance.

Mother Albirtha told Calpuniia of a secret river teaming with so very many fish that when caught, they would sink a boat. Mother Albirtha told her to trust her sense of finding the river by following her nose.

Eventually finding the magic river, Calpurnia was astounded at the amount and size of the fish. Using her paper roses as bait, she caught many fish.

Giving fish to the animals along the way, there still was enough overflowing to give to Mother Albirtha and her father to sell.

Highly recommended.

The illustrations are breath taking!!!

Melissa says

Any book that gives me goosebumps gets five stars! Did you see the face in the forest? Did you see the hands in the bear grass? Did you see the fish in the leaves? Did you see Mother Albirtha's necklace change expressions? Did you see the chairs at Calpurnia's house repaired in two different ways? *happy sigh* I love the tonal shifts in color throughout the book, from thin gray dawn to golden green afternoon to golden brown sunset to deep blue night. I love the folkloric narrative arc of the story, too. I've put a hold on the 1955 version, to read the "slightly longer version" mentioned in the end notes, and also to see the other illustrations.

Barbara says

Calpurnia loves to think up rhymes and spend time with her dog Buggy-horse. When her father tells that times are hard for everyone, she decides to find some fish in order to help out. After getting directions from a neighbor, she finds a secret river where fish abound. She catches plenty but then must make her way home in the dark. As she encounters an owl, a bear, and a panther, she offers them fish in order to pass safely. Her father is able to sell the fish, enabling its buyers to find the strength to work again, and hard times improve. The acrylic illustrations are impressive, often hiding faces in the forest's tree trunks and mirroring her image in the water. Everything about this book is beautiful--even the endpapers with fish floating in tandem across them.

Christopher says

The first solid Caldecott contender for 2012, Leo & Diane Dillon have done some of their best work in this retelling of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Newbery Honor book from 1958. Many of the almost full page illustrations contain many hidden images that further enrich the already strong and solid story. Rawlings story of a young girl, Calpurnia, and her dog setting out to find the answer for her small town's financial issues is one that is relatable to todays financial and economic situation. Leo & Diane Dillon's fantastic award-worthy illustrations open this classic tale to a whole new generation of readers. BRAVO!

Ashley says

I read the original 1955 edition of this children's book, illustrated by Leonard Weisgard, after a fascinating lecture on the origins of the book and the differences between the Weisgard method of illustrating it and the illustrations in the new 2011 release of the book. The story was published posthumously, and there is some indication that Rawlings intended to turn the story into a longer young adult novel, like *The Yearling*. Beautifully written, the story follows a young black girl named Capurnia, who considers herself a poet, as she tries to save her family and community from "hard times" by seeking out a secret river in the woods full of fish in a time when there seems to be no fish for her father to sell. The most interesting part of the illustration method is that Weisgard chose to have the book printed on tan colored paper to capture the skin tone of the characters while drawing them in outline form, rather than coloring them in with a skin tone. Rawlings, a white author, had complex relationships with black authors and neighbors in Florida during the 1930s and 1940s. She had a strong friendship with Zora Neal Hurston, but Hurston still entered her home through the back door when she visited. This children's book is beautifully written and simply magical in its adventures. It also delves into the natural ecology of rural Florida in detail.

Amber Scaife says

A girl, whose father needs fish to sell in his market, sets out to find the magical secret river. Short and sweet. Lovely illustrations.

Roy says

Absolutely wonderful! My daughter still yearns for picture books over chapter books with spot illustrations here and there, but she's old (and ridiculously bright) enough to want stories with more depth and substance than is to be found in shorter children's books intended for limited attention spans. This book is a fantastic bridge from child to kid literature. The entire family was enchanted by this sweet, mystical tale of a girl who wants to do her part to turn hard times into soft.

Kris says

I agree with the goodreads review by Marika, who said "The Dillons' illustrations bring depth to the story, expanding the text and showing the magic and imagination present in Calpurnia's world." The cover art intrigued me right away, I could hardly walk by without picking this one up. I don't know how this book stands up against others this year, Caldecott-wise, but it may just get a nod from the Coretta Scott King committee.

The entire book follows the same pattern illustratively -- one full-page illustration, with a smaller inset and one or two vignettes on the text page. Stylized and beautifully detailed they bring out the imaginative elements of the story.

SLJ: "Rawlings's story, somewhat trimmed to picture-book length, has a whole new aura... Illuminated by the Dillons' exquisite artwork, the tale accentuates the enchantment of Calpurnia's journey.... Brilliantly composed images, where the young girl's face is at times superimposed over objects in the story or seemingly floats over the magical river, have a lustrous glow... Imagined in striking scenes, Calpurnia and Buggy-horse's encounters with an owl, a bear, and a panther effectively capture the Florida back country that Rawlings famously drew upon in her writings...."

Booklist: "...glowing, full-page acrylic paintings and small freestanding images that capture the story's magic realism from a child's viewpoint...Filled with pattern and texture, the images occasionally have a static quality... They are at their best in scenes of the brave child on her perilous journey, finding her way back in the dark, past an owl, a big black bear, and a crouching panther, until she returns to her parents' loving embrace..."

Tasha says

Luminously illustrated by the Dillons, this new version of a classic children's book truly shines. The only children's book written by the author of *The Yearling*, this story is about Calpurnia, a young girl who is a poet. She woke up one gorgeous morning and found that she had a journey ahead of her. Her father told the family that he had no fish to sell in his fish market. So Calpurnia decided to catch some fish herself. She made roses out of crepe paper for bait and then headed to get advice from Mother Albirtha, the wisest person in the forest. When Calpurnia asked Mother Albirtha where she could catch big fish, Mother Albirtha told her of the secret river that was full of fish and advised Calpurnia to follow her nose. So off Calpurnia went with her dog at her side to find the river. Eventually, Calpurnia found the river and caught some large fish to help her father. But that was just the start of her adventures in the forest, because she had to get back home.

Rawlings' writing is filled with such depth here. While the story is written for children, it will ask them to stretch, to imagine and to dream. The writing is filled with small touches, turns of phrase that add such beauty to the text. Rawlings also had a poet for a main character, so Calpurnia's poems are throughout the book. One of my favorite passages happens early in the book where Calpurnia creates a poem and after her mother criticizes one of the phrases turns right around and creates a new poem that focuses on that phrase. Just that one piece is a testament to writing and creativity, as is the entire book.

Dillons' illustrations take the book to an even higher level. They are illustrations that are celebrate the beauty of light on skin, the depth of dark in a forest, the shine of wisdom on a face, and the blackness of animal fur. The illustrations vary in size, ranging from full page images to smaller illustrations in the margins of the text. There are illustrations so lovely here that one lingers on the page long after the words have been read, just absorbing the image. It is simply beautiful.

This is a treat of a new version of a classic. It is a perfect marriage of illustration and writing that celebrates both. Appropriate for ages 6-8.
