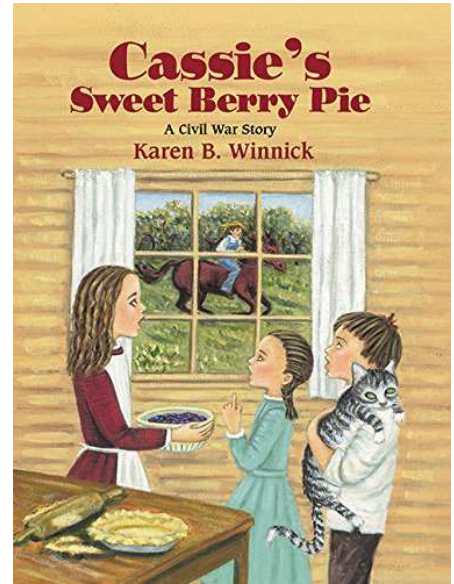


Curriculum Extensions for *CASSIE'S SWEET BERRY PIE*

Written and illustrated by Karen B. Winnick

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I happened upon the inspiration for *CASSIE'S SWEET BERRY PIE: A Civil War Story* in an unexpected place—a history text about the Jews of early Mississippi. An anecdote from the book gave me the idea. In real life the heroine was a woman named Caroline Rosenbaum. The history book only briefly mentioned the story of Mrs. Rosenbaum's trick but the one short paragraph sparked my imagination. I created Cassie, Willie, Saralyn, the huckleberry pie, even Boots, the cat. I like to write about children who use their imagination and ingenuity to overcome difficulties. Particularly, I like to show strong girls in my stories because I'd like my readers to believe in their own abilities. Hopefully, they will be inspired to trust their instincts, follow their beliefs, and rely on their own resourcefulness.



A Q&A about my writing and historical research:

What made you decide to write a Civil War story from a Southern perspective?

Most stories for children are told from the “winning side”. In the case of the Civil War, this is of course the North’s perspective. But there are rarely “good” guys and “bad” guys. There are just ordinary human beings: men, women and children who suffer and struggle to survive. Mostly, I wanted to express that there are good people on both sides of a conflict.

You are the author of several kinds of picture books, but the only sub-genre you’ve repeated is the historical picture book. What makes you return to this format? Is there something it allows you to express that you think children find particularly compelling?

I usually set my stories in the historical past because I believe that paying attention to the past can teach us about our lives today. One way my stories are alike, too, is that they show children’s empowerment.

In your research, what kind of interesting details did you learn about Southerners of the time period?

How people lived, what they ate and how they prepared it, how they appeared in dress and manner, what was important to them—all of these rich details made Cassie and her family come alive for me and, I hope, for my readers. I contacted historians at the

Mississippi Historical Society and other venues to find out, for example, what berries Cassie might have used to bake her pie. In fact, when I finally found huckleberries, I even squished them and painted my face and arms to see how it might look. I found out what diseases were prevalent—measles was the illness I chose. I toured houses from the Civil War era and looked at furniture, bedding, cooking utensils, etc. I studied fabrics and patterns from the 1860's. It is so absorbing to learn how people lived in another era.

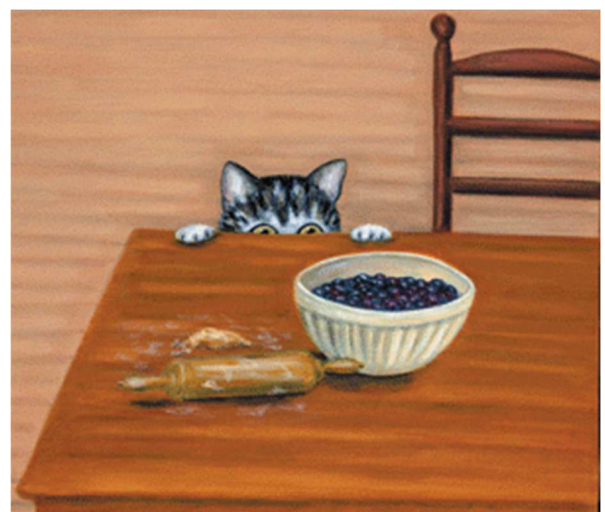


What materials and techniques did you choose for the art in this book, and why?

For a picture book, I like to replicate a style of painting that artists used at the time of the story. For Cassie, I used oil paints on canvas and primed the canvas in a brown color called sepia as artists would have done then. It gives the art an old-fashioned appearance, different from painting directly on a white canvas. I drew on the canvas with a brush and then began painting. All along I imagined the scene, the characters, and elements such as shadows and illumination.

Boots the cat plays a pivotal part in Cassie. How does his presence in the story reflect the presence of animals in your own life?

I am an animal lover. I always enjoy including at least one animal in a story because they are fun to write about and even more fun to paint. Boots' role is so important because he gets berry juice on his face when he darts under the bed. Boots reveals the humanity of the young Union soldier and the main



theme of the story, that there are good people on both sides of a conflict. The young soldier's gentleness is shown in his affection for Boots. Most important, though, is the fact that he discovers the truth about those red spots, yet doesn't give Cassie away.

Activities to do and things to think about after reading *CASSIE'S SWEET BERRY PIE*:

Imagine how you would have felt if you lived in the South during the Civil War? How would you have felt if you lived in the North? Choose one viewpoint and write about it.

Many of the soldiers were young boys like the soldier Cassie met. Do research about the drummer boys and other young soldiers. Imagine what it would be like if you had to travel so far from home with either the Union or Confederate army. How would you have felt?

Why did the South want to secede from the Union? Why did the North want them to stay? List the states on either side of the conflict. What happened to border states like Maryland, Virginia and Missouri?

Find out about the important generals who fought in the Civil War -- General Lee, General Grant and General Sherman. Choose one and write his biography.

Many women had important and active roles during the Civil War. Names like Clara Barton and Harriet Beecher Stowe are well-known; Rose O'Neal Greenhow (a Confederate spy) and Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (who received the Congressional Medal of Honor) are lesser known. Make a list of other women and their accomplishments, or choose one woman to research and write a report.

What are some of the similarities and differences between the Civil War fought in the US and recent civil wars fought in other countries such as Ireland, Bosnia and Rwanda?