

Cassie's Sweet Berry Pie: A Civil War Story

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Review

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Winnick, Karen B. *Cassie's Sweet Berry Pie: A Civil War Story*. Boyds Mills Press, \$16.95 hardcover ISBN 1563979845

Home alone

Sticky situation for home-front youngsters

Huckleberries grow wild throughout the United States and provide a bountiful harvest of deep purple berries generally in the early summer months. Author and illustrator Karen B. Winnick sets the scene of her new picture book on a summer day sometime during the latter half of the Civil War in Marion, Mississippi, and the key ingredient to her Civil War juvenile fiction is a bowl of huckleberries.

Three siblings, Cassie, Willie, and Saralyn have been left alone in their one room cabin house while their mother is out to tend injured Confederate soldiers in a nearby hospital. The full-page color illustrations show the three children at work preparing a berry pie when a neighbor abruptly informs the trio that thieving Yankees are on their way to raid the community. Cassie, the oldest child, devises a clever plan to protect the children, the family's few treasured belongings, and the ever precious food supply.

Cassie hides the valued goods under the large bed and orders her brother and sister to lie in bed with the covers on. She adds logs to the fire and paints dots with berry juice on the faces of the two youngsters to create a scene of two sick children. When the cantankerous Union soldiers force their way into the cabin and begin to trash the tidy household, they discover Willie and Saralyn in the big bed. One especially young Yankee soldier talks with Cassie and notices the unusual heated interior, the evidence of goods hidden under the bed, and the berry stained faces of the two little children. Cassie tells the grown up soldiers that Willie and Saralyn have the measles and the boy soldier plays along to help frighten the marauding soldiers away. The successful trio celebrates their clever

trick and finishes baking their berry pie.

Winnick tells the story of children out-witting adults in the throes of what is normally considered a violent and perilous setting. Her expressive folk-art styled illustrations literally reflect her text and add a sense of humor and clarity to the meanings of her concisely told home-alone tale. The family cat, Boots, has comical expressions on each page and plays an important role in moving the story along. In fact, all the details Winnick employs are purposeful and do not weigh down the story with cumbersome description. The specificity offers young readers and listeners, ages 6 to 10, a wonderful opportunity to begin to engage with Civil War history in a non-threatening format.

The simplicity of **Cassie's Sweet Berry Pie: A Civil War Story** sends readers and listeners a lesson in addition to the desperate conditions of home-front Southerners. The picture book enforces the notion of an adult world that easily overlooks the ingenuity, talents, and abilities of children. The childhood fantasy of having one up on adults adds an element of pleasure to this war time story that could overshadow the seriousness of the history of war for some young readers.

Karen B. Winnick is the author and illustrator of *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers*, *Sybil's Night Ride*, *A Year Goes Round*, and *Barn Sneeze*. She studied art at Syracuse University, New York University, the School of Visual Arts, and UCLA. Winnick taught elementary school for nine years and is a published poet. **Cassie's Sweet Berry Pie** is a reflection of Winnick's accomplished career as a children's book author and illustrator.

Winnick's beautiful oil painted illustrations and careful selection of vocabulary make **Cassie's Sweet Berry Pie** a good choice for family reading and classroom reading. The book measures approximately 11 x 9, which is a good size for group readings, and Winnick offers readers enough details to prompt follow-up questions. For example, why would a boy be a soldier? This picture book conveys historical and fanciful concepts through expressive images and text that encourage reflection and discussions.

Julia Rose is a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Louisiana State University. Her research focuses on the ethics of representations of slave life in Louisiana museums. Rose has been a contributor to the CWBR since 2001.