



True North

Kathryn Lasky

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Now in paperback, this is Lasky's stimulating, acclaimed historical novel set in pre-Civil War America. Two girls risk their lives on the Underground Railroad and must keep on the right course -- true north.

True North Details

Date : Published June 1st 1998 by Scholastic Paperbacks (first published 1996)

ISBN : 9780590205245

Author : Kathryn Lasky

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade

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From Reader Review True North for online ebook

Autumn says

Loved this story. Truly enjoyed it. Lasky, as with other books I have read of hers, takes her research and creates a well-written, solid story. She gives life to the the people who both supported and opposed the freedom of slaves, and she presents a very real look at what people experienced as slaves, and the contention between those who worked to free them and those who sought to catch the fugitives. She also offers a real image of the Underground Railroad so it becomes more than just words or an idea, but real people with real "stations" risking their own lives to save others'. Inspirational and good book.

Alex says

Picked this one up because it looked good (Newberry bait -- did I just make up that term?), and because Kathryn Lasky also wrote the Owls of Ga'Hoole series.

...and, it was pretty darn good. Great children's fiction, dealing very frankly and bluntly with the realities of plantation slave life, and life in new england in the 1850s.

I enjoyed the characterization, the plot, and the pacing. I really think Kathryn Lasky is much better suited as an author to this type of fiction (historical, I guess? real-life?) rather than the weak fantasy that she was writing with the Owls of Ga'Hoole [again, see the movie, skip the books].

The only thing keeping this from being a 5-star review is that this isn't the type of thing I typically go for (oh-so-serious children's lit), but it's great if you're ready to read that type of thing.

Oh-- did I mention there was more than one reference to owls in this? I'd imagine that Ms. Lasky was beginning her owl research that eventually led to Ga'Hoole when she wrote this book (published 1996-- first Ga'Hoole books some time about 2003)

Michael Elrod says

This book brought up interesting ideas that I'd never even considered. I've known of the underground railroad, and of slave-running, but there are aspects of this book that would've never crossed my mind. Like the danger involved in running these routes to freedom. I would've never thought of Harriet Tubman as a gun wielding woman. Afrika and Lucy are from different universes. Afrika has escaped her Virginia Plantation, and Lucy is a restless, young rich girl. Only in this book would you have these two make acquaintances, and seek individual freedom. This book is written in a creative manner that makes it a page turner. You read separately of Lucy and Afrika and know at some point their worlds will intersect, but you don't know how or when. When they finally do, their journey and friendship is captivating. This was a good book! Well written. Quick read.

Warnings: Guns pointed at heads, slave situations and oppression. Death of babies/infants, mild violence, tight situations.

Megan says

I first read this years ago for a middle school academic pentathlon. I can't say I remembered much when I went to pick it up again, but it's always interesting to revisit a book from childhood.

I liked it. It's a nice introduction to the underground railroad for younger audiences. The story alternates between Lucy (a white adolescent living in Massachusetts) and Afrika (a black adolescent on the run to the North). Afrika's story was full of action and her character was strong and admirable. Lucy had a tendency to be whiny and came off much younger than her written age, but it was bearable and redeemed itself eventually.

This book was reminiscent of *Number the Stars* for me - a historical fiction tale of one brave girl from a privileged class working to save a same-aged peer in danger. Still, I think it is worth reading, and I'll keep it around for my children to pick up one day.

[Book set in Massachusetts: 50 Books 50 States][Book with a direction (N/S/E/W) in the title: Semi-Charmed Winter Book Challenge 2014][Book you can read in a day: Popsugar Book Challenge 2015]

Kenny says

Afrika by Kathryn Lasky is about this girl who tries to escape and run away from a slave owner that is trying to rape her. The girl's name is Afrika, and she along with a white girl known as Lucy were slaves that had owners. From reading this book, this book reminds me of another book, Woman at Point Zero where a girl had been raped as well. This book is more of a history for younger kids to know about the underground railroad, abolitionists, and freedom. All of these are presented in this novel that is written by Kathryn Lasky. I do not really like this book, but it is a great lesson to learn for students taking history. The girl Afrika was guided to freedom in this book.

Christian Emmanuel says

True North is a story about two young girls Lucy and Afrika. They are both at different polarities, Lucy being a well off child in a rich family and Afrika, a slave girl who is running from her master who whips her for not laying with him. During this time a law had been passed so that if a slave was caught it had to be sent back to its master. There were individuals however called abolitionist who believed in the sanctity and freedom of life. This was controversial however and especially opposed by influential individuals as this was their means of becoming wealthy. Lucy is unaware that her grandfather who is a doctor is one of the abolitionist and finds out about it when she spies on him. He unfortunately dies of a Stroke and is unable to be of help in the underground railroad. Lucy and Afrika's lives are intertwined one day when Afrika arrives in Lucy's grandfather's house which is one of the stops in the Underground railroad. She helps Afrika to finally reach Canada safely encountering many unexpected events along the way.

It was interesting to learn about the Underground railroad and the challenges that a person faces trying to get from one station master to another. This book also showed me that Legality and Morality are two separate concepts. People are what make laws but our intuitions and consciousness guide our moral being. Even though slavery was legal during that time many were opposed to it because they believed in the moral freedom of an individual. It is sad to read about how a slave woman and her child are separated so that they will sell the young child to be a slave somewhere else. Also how they were persecuted for praying and trying to learn how to read and write. I am so glad that the injustices of this world are slowly being removed. I believe all it takes is an open mind to be accepting of other peoples backgrounds.

Sydney FLoyd says

Lucy would rather spend time with her grandfather studying owls and going sailing than spend time with her other sisters primping for the latest parties. However, as a young teenager living in Boston during the 1850s, she is expected to act a certain way. But soon she finds she isn't the only one who is forced to act one way while really thinking and feeling another. Her grandfather, Pap, she finds out, is a conductor for the Underground Railroad. When escaping slaves make it to Boston, he helps hide them and gets them on the way to Canada. Eventually Lucy also finds herself helping an escaped slave. Her name is Afrika and they are around the same age. Together they both learn the importance of trust, of truth, and of doing what they know is right. While reading this book I understood both of their struggles, and could compare this to my journey through life today.

Ardith says

Amazing. Always wanted to read this one. I'd recommend it to anyone!

Carley says

True North is a easy read. You can get done with it pretty quickly if you are focused on it. I thought it was a interesting book. But it was not my favorite. I thought it took a while to get to the better parts and that there were some odd parts that I thought were weird. I felt really awkward towards Lucy at the beginning and I didn't even really like Afrika either. I think you have to be kind of a historical person to find this book interesting because its taken place back in the days and they are really different from today's time. I just didnt find the book that great but not horrible. But I think if someone asked me if they should read I would tell them to give a chance. Just because it wasn't my favorite book doesnt mean someone may not like it.

Nancy Cavanaugh says

Readers will feel as if they have actually travelled the Underground Railroad. So real. So compelling. Historical fiction at its best!

Kim says

This is an exceptional book. It's exciting and it's heartwarming and it's sad. I couldn't put it down wondering what was going to happen next and it's never what you think.

Latanya says

Afrika is a runaway enslaved girl who desperately escapes from a slave owner who repeatedly raped her. This book addresses an aspect of history likely to be omitted from textbooks. Upper elementary advanced readers are better suited to tackle True North's higher level vocabulary.

The story has a feminist perspective and describes parallels between the lives of Afrika, desperate for freedom, and Lucy – a wealthy white girl who is similar to Afrika in her desire to be free. Lucy's escape, however, is from constraints that her aristocratic family impose. The girls form a bond, working with abolitionists guiding Afrika to freedom. Although it is a work of fiction, True North gives the reader an accurate depiction of dangers faced by those seeking freedom and betrayal abolitionists faced. The book also clears up traditional misrepresentations - making it clear that slavery was supported in the North as well as the South.

NICOLE SCRIBNER says

This book, by Kathryn Lasky, is a work of historical fiction. It starts off in Boston, Ma. However, we also journey to other places along the east coast. The main theme is the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman's contributions- a movement that was led by none other than herself- Harriet Tubman, and several strong abolitionists that would help slaves get free on their journey from the south to Canada.

"True North" is defined by the moss that grows on the north side of the trees. At least this is how one of the main characters knows it- Afrika. That doesn't keep her out of trouble along the way though. Her road to freedom is no easy task. After Captain Briggs brought her to his furthest point north, he told her to make sure the river stays on the left- another "true north". See how her "hush puppies" get her out of a certain situation when two drunk slave hunters- Jephtha and Luke have their run in with her.

While in Boston, Ma- the idea of marriage nuptials of her older sister bores Lucy. However, she would settle for an adventure with her grandfather. He teaches her the importance of her name, owling, and sailing stuff- but there's one mystery Lucy is going to find out on her own- about the mystical humanitarian-Levi Bradford.

To see what Lucy finds out about her grandfather, and more of the mystery that she learns of, read True North. See how Lucy can be of assistance in the Underground Railroad movement in this historical work of fiction. In my opinion, this is a wonderfully written educational piece that you will not be disappointed in. Happy Reading.

Margaret says

This book gives a picture of humans making other humans pretty miserable. We should be so happy that slavery is over. There was a lot of implied rape and it showed how the slaveowners sometimes sired their own slave children. It would be difficult for pre junior high students to relate to. It is something that though written for younger middle school readers would do well with even high school students.

Common Core Tie in-Objective 2

Analyze the evolution of democracy and the extension of democratic principles.

- a. Examine how the Supreme Court strengthened the national government.
- b. Analyze how states' rights issues led to growing sectionalism.
- c. Investigate the relationship between national and state governments in expanding democracy.
- d. Appraise how the political process changed to involve more people.

Objective 3

Analyze the impact of social reforms on Americans during the 19th century.

- a. Examine the abolitionist movement; e.g., Sojourner Truth, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglas, the Grimke sisters.
- b. Investigate the impact of reform in education, religion, prisons and the treatment of the mentally ill during this period.
- c. Examine the extension of women's political and legal rights.

Standard 9

Students will understand the significance of the Civil War Era to the United States.

Katie Johnson says

True North is a breath-taking novel about the uncommon friendship that was found between a runaway slave and a girl that comes from a wealthy white family. Afrika is a former slave that found her way onto to the Underground Railroad, but when she got seperated from the leader, Harriet Tubman, she was left isolated to find her way to freedom on her own. Opposite to Afrika, Lucy is a young girl who finds pure enjoyment out of spending all her time with her grandpa, and being adventurous. I found this book likable due to the reality behind the characters and the situations and scenarios they endure. Although I like some aspects of this novel, if I said that it was a favorite of mine, I would be lying. I did like some characteristics this novel had, but for the most part, I did not like the book. I think that this novel would've been more interesting and to my liking if it didn't get so confusing and easy to get lost in. Every few chapters of the book, it changes stories between

Afrika and Lucy. After transferring stories for a majority of the book, Afrika and Lucy finally met. Once they met in the novel, I feel that the end of the story was too rushed. In my personal opinion, I think the author should've had Afrika and Lucy meet earlier in the novel, giving more time for the reader to get to know the two completely different girls friendship. I think that if the reader could endure the friendship for a longer period, the book could've been more interesting and likeable. After reading the novel, I kind of felt dissatisfied in the book, in general, but still, it did have some twists and interesting moments that contributed to the better aspects and qualities that the novel had.
