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# The Face on the Milk Carton

By Caroline Cooney

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Summary.....	2
About the Author.....	3
Book Review.....	4
Discussion Questions.....	5
Author Interview.....	7
Further Reading.....	11



## SUMMARY

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This book is centered on Janie Johnson. Janie is a typical teenager who is getting excited about finally getting her license to drive. Her world gets turned upside down, however when she is in the lunchroom one day and sees a familiar face on the back of a milk carton, her own! She is convinced that it is *her* picture on the carton; with the help of her neighbor and new boyfriend, Reeve, she sets out to find the truth. Was she really born to Frank and Miranda Johnson or was she taken from a shopping mall in New Jersey so many years ago?

Steve Stelloh, Resident Scholar

[http://www.allreaders.com/topics/Info\\_10191.asp](http://www.allreaders.com/topics/Info_10191.asp)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Caroline Cooney was born in 1947 and grew up in Old Greenwich, Connecticut. An excellent student and ambitious youth, she loved school and was involved in many different activities. By the time she was in tenth grade, Cooney played the piano for musical productions, directed a choir, and had a job as a church organist. Always an avid reader, Cooney often read series books such as *THE HARDY BOYS* and *CHERRY AMES*. These characters had a big influence on her life and in fact, she says, "*CHERRY AMES, STUDENT NURSE*, was my reason to go to nursing school in Boston later in life."

Cooney graduated from Greenwich High School in 1965 and attended various colleges, where she studied music, art, and English. It was in college that she began writing, and discovered a talent and joy in what would become an award-winning writing career. Cooney professes, "I love writing and do not know why it is considered such a difficult, agonizing profession. I love all of it, thinking up the plots, getting to know the kids in the story, their parents, backyards, pizza toppings."

Cooney's love of writing for young adults is clearly demonstrated in her numerous celebrated novels including: *DRIVER'S ED*, *AMONG FRIENDS*, *TWENTY PAGEANTS LATER*, and the time travel novels, *BOTH SIDES OF TIME* and *OUT OF TIME*. She is a master of mixing spellbinding suspense with thought-provoking insight into teenagers' lives.

Among Cooney's most popular books are the best-selling novels *THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON*, *WHATEVER HAPPENED TO JANIE?* and *THE VOICE ON THE RADIO*. These gripping novels tell the story of Janie Johnson, a young girl who recognizes herself in a picture of a missing child on a milk carton, and subsequently unravels a complicated history of abduction, fear and deceit. To satisfy the hundreds of fans wanting to know more, Cooney recently concluded Janie's captivating story with *WHAT JANIE FOUND*, a gripping novel of betrayal.

An accomplished writer, author, and mother of three children, Caroline Cooney shares her knowledge and love of writing on visits to schools, libraries and conferences. She lives in Westbrook, Connecticut.

<http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-cooney-caroline.asp>



## BOOK REVIEW

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Just by looking at a little photograph, Janie Johnson's life is changed. Only complaining that her name is too simple, when discovering how complex her life may really be, she goes on a mission to find her real self.

I must admit that at first glance, I judged this book, **THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON**, by its cover. Although that's wrong, I must say that I was attracted to it since the beginning. While reading this book I was amazed, but also terrified. Just imagining what Janie Johnson was going through is scary. This book perfectly describes the emotions of a confused teenager, and how complicated life can sometimes be. I have to say, that it surprises me how someone like Janie, living a normal calm life, wouldn't go crazy discovering such a different life that was always present. This drama really got inside of me, and definitely made me do serious thinking about how much my family means to me, and how well do I know myself. This book is definitely worth reading!

Read it and tell everyone you know to read it.

Claudia, age 14

Falcon Cove Middle School

April, 2005



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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**Warning! Some of these questions contain key element plots. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!**

1. What important event might have happened prior to the beginning of the story?
2. What made Janie realize it was really her picture on the milk carton? Why didn't Janie's friends believe her when she said it was her picture?
- 3.** Janie's friend Reeve seemed to be a misfit in his family. What made him feel that way?
4. What will Janie do about the milk carton when she gets home? What will she ask her parents? How will she act?
5. Janie's parents had many pictures of her, but no baby pictures. Why? Why didn't Janie accept this now? Why do you think she never questioned this before?
6. Why did Janie run next door? What did she learn from the past from Mrs. Shields?
7. Janie told her mother that she would need to get her birth certificate in order to apply for her driver's license. How did her mother react? Could this be Janie's imagination?
8. Why didn't Janie share her fears with anyone? Janie has some serious emotions. How will she react to Reeve's playfulness and his friendship?
9. Why do you think Reeve did not come back to Janie after the phone call? Was he running away from Janie to forget the kiss? What other reasons might there be?
10. Why did Janie have trouble calling the 800-number? What could happen if Janie talked to the 800-number?
11. How do you think Janie was able to concentrate on driving or anything else when she was worried about the kidnapping?
12. Was she able to act "normal" at the tailgate picnic?
13. What is an "identity crisis"?
14. What was the teacher referring to in his comment on the paper? How did *identity crisis* happen to Janie?

15. Jason did not remember Janie's picture episode on the milk carton, but what "terrible history" could Jane Johnson have?

<http://www.cobb.k12.ga.us/~schoolimprovement/literacy/Facemilk.doc>



## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

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**Teenreads** Writer Audrey Marie Danielson had a chance to speak with the very prolific and talented YA mystery writer, Caroline B. Cooney. If you haven't already discovered Cooney's nail biting suspense tales, now is the time. She's made quite an impression on the YA world with her four book "Janie" series starting with **THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON**, an intense story that starts when Janie sees her face on the carton. But this is not the whole of Cooney's work --- she has written 75 books!

**Teenreads: Your Janie series --- THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO JANIE?, THE VOICE ON THE RADIO, and WHAT JANIE FOUND is very popular. How do you decide which stories to make into series, and which ones to begin and end with one book?**

**CC:** Sometimes when I've written a book, it's finished in my heart as well. Those books I don't really think about again. Others remain in my heart and I feel very intimate with the characters, such as Janie. Sometimes I can't tell at first if a single book should become a series. My editors, one at Random House and one at Scholastic, have helped me decide that for twenty years. **THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON** was written as a stand-alone book. I wanted the reader to reach that last page and have to go on worrying about Janie, just as parents have to go on worrying about their children. My readers wrote to me continually asking for a sequel. Our minister gave a sermon based on the Old Testament story of King Solomon facing two women, each insisting she is the mother of the baby. The real mother is the one who loves her child enough to give the baby up. Right away, I knew that that was the story for the sequel, **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO JANIE?** I didn't plan to write a third, but when my son went to college and became involved with his college radio station, I was amazed by the amorality of talk shows; the constant betrayal of those you formerly loved. That became **THE VOICE ON THE RADIO**.

**Teenreads: How emotionally involved do you get with your characters, especially in the Janie series?**

**CC:** In the Janie books, I was very close to every character and loved them.

**Teenreads: Are any of your characters based on real people? Have you used experiences from your own life in your novels?**

**CC:** Almost never. If you write a story based on a real person, you're trapped by the details of the real person and his life. It gets in the way of writing your own story. My first historical novel, **THE RANSOM OF MERCY CARTER** is the first time I wrote something where the ending was completed for me. I had no choice about what actually happened to Mercy. I have used experiences from my life. My daughter became an EMT volunteer while she was in high school and stayed in ambulance work for years. I wrote a book about teenage rescue workers called **FLIGHT #116 IS DOWN**.

**Teenreads: How do you get your ideas for your plots and characters, such as Emlyn in MUMMY? She's an unusual girl with her library of "wrong things to do, and how to do them." Moreover, she outwits everyone with her very creative solution to the problem of what to do with the mummy. What inspired Emlyn?**

**CC:** I'm one of the lucky writers: plots come easily to me. My editors help me narrow down the selection and decide what to write. I'd always wanted to write about somebody with a streak of larceny in her and that book became **MUMMY**.

**Teenreads: Some readers feel that a few of your graver novels such as BURNING UP and THE TERRORIST are not written with enough seriousness. What do you think of that statement? Do you deliberately keep things more lighthearted or do you feel they are serious enough?**

**CC:** I don't know that anybody ever said that to me. I approach serious subjects, and I like to have the good guys win and have the parents among the good guys. I like a family story where the family does the right thing in the end. The Janie books feature two good families. I believe my readers are crazy about their parents and want to be just like them when they grow up.

**Teenreads: You studied to be a nurse. When did writing become your main pursuit**

**CC:** I went to nursing school for a year and didn't finish; studied music and didn't finish; in fact, I never finished college. I'm sort of thinking of going back one of these days and getting a degree. I wrote eight full-length adult novels in my twenties. None of them were published. I decided to write short stories because they got rejected quicker. I found that I had a voice for children's writing, and I never looked back.

**Teenreads: How did you establish your writing style? Has it changed much over the years?**

**CC:** I believe my voice is pretty much the same. I've written 75 books,

so I'm better at it now than I was earlier in my career.

**Teenreads: Do you feel that your books have helped young people who were reluctant to become avid readers?**

**CC:** Yes, definitely. I'm very proud of this. I get letters from readers who say that they have always hated reading, but somebody suggested one of my books, they actually finished the book and enjoyed it, and they're going on to read another book. I'm thrilled that they have figured out that reading is fun.

**Teenreads: Who was your favorite author when you were young? Which author do you feel influenced you the most in your decision to become a writer?**

**CC:** I had no favorites because I read books by the armload. I had favorite libraries. I had teachers who influenced me to become a writer, but no specific author.

**Teenreads: What are you currently reading?**

**CC:** When I read fiction, it's usually mysteries. But mostly I read nonfiction. I read lots of history. I love ancient history, Rome, Greece, Egypt!

**Teenreads: Is there a contemporary Young Adult author that you especially admire? Which current YA or adult writers would you recommend to teens?**

**CC:** I admire most YA authors. I go to a lot of conventions and meet lots of my fellow authors. People who care whether or not kids read are always worth meeting

**Teenreads: Do you think young adults read more or less, than they used to? Do they read differently than when you were young?**

**CC:** I think they're reading more. Reading often follows a fad. For a while the fad was horror novels; recently it took a swing toward diary format; I think now we'll see an upsurge in fantasy.

**Teenreads: How much research do you do for your books? Do you have people help you, or do you prefer to research yourself?**

**CC:** I write three books a year. Most of my books are fiction and require no research. However, for **THE RANSOM OF MERCY CARTER**, I became caught up in the incident. I did two years research some of which was the Colonial Period in America, the Jesuits in French Canada and other facts. Finally one day I said, "Maybe I should actually write the book."

**Teenreads: Out of all your books, who is the character you feel closest to?**

**CC:** My favorite characters are always the ones I'm writing about at

the moment.

**Teenreads: What is your writing day like and do you have any specific process for writing?**

**CC:** My writing day was always based on my children's school bus schedule. I started writing at 7:15 AM when the bus picked up the kids, and finished at 2:15 PM when the bus dropped them off. I still follow that schedule.

**Teenreads: How do you keep your writing fresh? Is there an aspect of writing that is difficult for you?**

**CC:** Luckily, I love writing and it comes easily. I don't worry about what kids are wearing right now, or what the slang is. It dates the story. Everything that really matters in a story (or in life) are just the same: do I honor my parents, am I popular, what will I do with my life, am I doing the right thing?

**Teenreads: Do you work on more than one book at a time, and how long does it take you to finish a novel?**

**CC:** I work on two or three books at a time. I write three books a year, so it takes me approximately three to four months to finish a book.

**Teenreads: What advice would you give to young people who want to be writers?**

**CC:** Learning to write is exactly like learning a musical instrument or a sport. You have to practice every day if you want to become good at it. There are no short cuts.



## Further Reading

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**If you liked *The Face on the Milk Carton* by Caroline Cooney you might like the following books, too!**

*Taking Terri Muelle* by Norma Fox Mazer  
*Whatever Happened to Janie?* by Caroline Cooney  
*The Voice on the Radio* by Caroline Cooney  
*What Janie Found* by Caroline Cooney  
*The Cuckoo Sister* by Vivien Alcock  
*When Jeff Comes Home* by Catherine Atkins  
*Zero at the Bone* by Michael Cadnum  
*Finders* by Jan Dean  
*The Third Eye* by Lois Duncan  
*Missing Since Monday* by Ann M. Martin  
*Who Is Eddie Leonard?* by Harry Mazer  
*Solid Gold Kid* by Harry Mazer and Norma Fox  
*The Abduction* by Mette Newth  
*The Kidnapping of Christina Lattimore* by Joan Lowery Nixon  
*Someone Was Watching* by David Patneaude  
*Twice Taken* by Susan Pfeffer  
*The Year Without Michael* by Susan Pfeffer  
*Without a Trace* by Patricia Rushford  
*The Girl in the Box* by Ouida Sebestyen  
*The Famous Stanley Kidnapping Case* by Zilpha Snyder  
*Kidnapped!* by Robert Louis Stevenson  
*You'll Never Guess the End* by Barbara Wersba