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House of Dies Drear
by
Virginia Hamilton

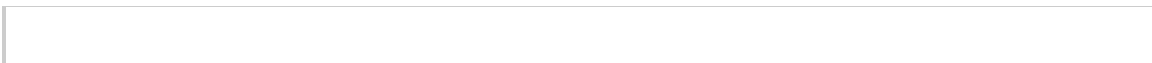


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SUMMARY

A huge, old house with secret tunnels, a cantankerous caretaker, and buried treasure is a dream-come-true for 13-year-old Thomas. The fact that it's reputedly haunted only adds to its appeal! As soon as his family moves in, Thomas senses something strange about the Civil War era house, which used to be critical stop on the Underground Railroad. With the help of his father, he learns about the abolitionists and escaping slaves who kept the Underground Railroad running. While on his own, he explores the hidden passageways in and under the house, piecing clues together in an increasingly dangerous quest for the truth about the past. Newbery medallist Virginia Hamilton creates a heart-pounding adventure with this absorbing classic for older readers.

(from amazon.com) 246 pages, 5th grade and up



From Multnomah County Library

<http://www.multcolib.org/talk/guides-house.html>

Accessed 10/27/05

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Virginia Hamilton

Virginia Hamilton, together with two brothers and two sisters, grew up on a large farm in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Her mother was Etta Belle. (You'll see that name in some of her books). Her father was Kenneth James Hamilton, the manager of the dining hall at nearby Antioch College and a farmer. The farm was large and was surrounded by the farms of other relatives. She has said that you could "range a whole day and never leave family land". She has lived in Columbus, Ohio, and New York City but she now lives back in Yellow Springs on a small piece of that farm with her husband Arnold Adoff, the poet and children's author. They have two children, Leigh and Jaime.

Virginia Hamilton's contribution to the field of African American literature for children is substantial and quite wonderful. This is partly because of the breadth of her work. She is a storyteller and many of her books are collections of African American folktales. Her novels explore new ground and have given us some of the strongest, most interesting characters in children's literature. Her non-fictional and biographical works bring the famous and the not so famous people of the past to the forefront. Virginia Hamilton always wanted to be a writer and when she burst into the field in 1967 with her first novel, **Zeely**, the children's book world had little doubt that a new strong voice had been heard from.

From Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site

<http://www.carolhurst.com/authors/vhamilton.html>

Accessed 11/26/05

Note: Virginia Hamilton died on February 19, 2002

BOOK REVIEW

Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com

A huge, old house with secret tunnels, a cantankerous caretaker, and buried treasure is a dream-come-true for 13-year-old Thomas. The fact that it's reputedly haunted only adds to its appeal! As soon as his family moves in, Thomas senses something strange about the Civil War era house, which used to be a critical stop on the Underground Railroad. With the help of his father, he learns about the abolitionists and escaping slaves who kept the Underground Railroad running. While on his own, he explores the hidden passageways in and under the house, piecing clues together in an increasingly dangerous quest for the truth about the past. Newbery medallist Virginia Hamilton creates a heart-pounding adventure with this absorbing classic for older readers. *(Ages 9 to 12)- This text refers to the [Hardcover](#) edition.*

From Amazon.com

Accessed 11/26/05

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before you started reading this book, what did you know about the Underground Railroad? What did you learn about it while reading?
2. Why does Thomas's father want so badly to live in the house of Dies Drear? How does the rest of the family feel about it?
3. What is the significance to Thomas's dream?
4. Describe Mr. Pluto. What is odd about him? Why is it so important to him to live independently?
5. How does history repeat itself when the Smalls move into the house?
6. What do you think motivates people to harass other people in the way the Darrows' are cruel to the Smalls? Do you think it is fair to teach these people a lesson?
6. In what ways are Thomas and his father alike?

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Accessed 11/26/05

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

A Visit with Virginia Hamilton

Award-winning author Virginia Hamilton reflects on the power of history and family, and the fine art of storytelling.

I became a writer at an early age--or maybe I was born one! It seems as if stories seep out of the very land where I've lived for so long. I was born in Yellow Springs, Ohio, on a small truck farm, the youngest of five children. I live on the last bit of the farmland that has been in my family for generations.

My mother was Etta Belle Perry. The Perry family settled in Ohio in the 1850s. Her father (my grandfather), Levi Perry, had been a fugitive from slavery in Virginia. I was named Virginia by my mother, lest I forget where I came from. Levi Perry was brought north on the Underground Railroad by his mother, Mary Cloud. Once he was safe, Mary Cloud promptly disappeared and was never heard from again. There are all sorts of stories as to what happened to Great-grandmother Mary. Some say she was caught and forced back into slavery. Other relatives think she was a conductor on the Railroad and perished somehow. The story always fascinated me, with its conclusion forever tantalizingly out of reach.

My grandfather Levi and his wife, Rhetta, had 10 children. My mother was the oldest daughter. Mother told me that every year Levi set her and her brothers and sisters down to tell them about his running away: "Listen children, and I'll tell you how I ran away from slavery, so you'll know never to let bondage happen to you."

I've never forgotten that true tale told to me so long ago. It was the first story my mother ever told me. It made a deep and lasting impression. All of the books I

write are generational because of it. That is, there are not only children in my books, but parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles, the way there are generations in my own life and family. Mother married my father, Kenneth Hamilton; my brothers and sisters and I had many cousins. Now I have children who have cousins, aunts, and uncles. Every other year there is a Perry family reunion. None of us would dare miss it!

All of my life experiences help make a fiction, although my books are not about my life. It is the way I explore the known, the remembered, and the imagined--the literary triad out of which all stories are made. I adore writing about children and young adults (even animals!) and how they fare in their lives.

I started writing stories in grade school. I won prizes for reading the most books and being able to tell the teacher what I'd read. And I won my first writing award as a student at Ohio State University for a short story. That story later became my first book, *Zeely*, published in 1967. I've written 36 books since then. Most of my books have some amount of history in them. Not my history, necessarily. But families that I create in fiction have pasts as well as futures. I try to make them as true to life as I can, and unique and original in themselves.

I learned "story" from my mom and dad, who were fine tellers. I love the idea that I am carrying on that tradition--the tradition that started with the daring true tale my grandfather Levi told his children. It's my pleasure to pass it on.

From Amazon.com

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ts/feature/6367/102-6382126-3477744>

Accessed 11/26/05

IF YOU LIKE...

The House of Dies Drear

by Virginia Hamilton,

you might like the following books, too!!

- *Trouble don't last* by Susan Pearsall
- *The Mystery of Drear House* by Virginia Hamilton
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor
- *Picture of Freedom: the diary of Clotee, a slave girl* by Patricia McKissack
- *Soon Be Free* by Lois Ruby
- *Silent Thunder* by Andrea Davis Pinkney
- *Who Comes with Cannons* by Patricia Beatty

Novelist

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