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River Runs Deep



Synopsis

In a stunning story that “makes history come alive” (Booklist), a boy is sent to Mammoth cave to fight a case of consumption and ends up fighting for the lives of a secret community of escaped slaves, who are hidden deep underground. Twelve-year-old Elias has consumption, so he is sent to Kentucky’s Mammoth Cave—the biggest cave in America—where the cool vapors are said to be healing. At first, living in a cave sounds like an adventure, but after a few days, Elias feels more sick of boredom than his illness. So he is thrilled when Stephen, one of the slaves who works in the cave, invites him to walk further through its depths. But there are more than just tunnels and stalagmites waiting to be discovered; there are mysteries hiding around every turn. The truths they conceal are far more stunning than anything Elias could ever have imagined, and he finds himself caught in the middle of it all while he’s supposed to be resting. But how can he focus on saving his own life when so many others are in danger?

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 13 years

Grade Level: 4 - 8

Customer Reviews

Gr 4—Twelve-year-old Elias is sent from his Virginia home to Dr. Crogan’s experimental hospital located within the Mammoth Caves of Kentucky, in the hopes that he can be

cured of consumption (tuberculosis). In this pre-Civil War setting, patients are served by slaves, who also lead cave tours. When Elias surreptitiously follows a slave named Stephen into a tunnel, he discovers a network of secret tunnels that house a hidden community of runaway slaves. When a patient and former boat crew member, Pennyrile, gets suspicious and begins investigating, the runaway slaves must quickly hide their existence. The slaves forced to work at the Mammoth Cave protect their pride and dignity in multifaceted manners. Stephen and another slave named Jonah play jokes on the white tourists, such as making them believe that they have encountered a ghost. Descriptions of Dr. Croghan's primitive medical treatments, such as intentional bleeding, forced vomiting, and homemade instruments, illustrate the painful and fruitless state of health care for tuberculosis patients at that time. A further reading section describes the author's personal connection to the story, provides additional titles, and includes details about the real-life characters in the story and the treatment of tuberculosis. This work boasts richly developed African American characters and extraordinary settings. VERDICT Recommended for libraries wanting to expand their historical fiction collection. —Jennifer Schultz, Fauquier County Public Library, Warrenton, VA

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A tubercular boy is sent to live in a cave that might heal him. Bradbury uses an odd historical fact to jump-start a story about the Underground Railroad. After his father dies from consumption, 12-year-old Elias, suffering from the same disease, is sent from eastern Virginia to live inside Kentucky's Mammoth Cave. This enormous underground labyrinth, already a tourist attraction in the 1840s, is also a sanitarium. Dr. John Croghan believes "cave vapors" can cure the disease, but he also tries restrictive diets, immobility, and horse-urine baths. Numerous slaves attend the patients and also lead tours of the caves; in their off hours they explore the cave's unknown edges. Bored and lonely, Elias begins to follow them, discovering that a far cavern actually houses runaway slaves — now trapped and running low on supplies due to guards at the entrances. Elias's family owns slaves, and he's never questioned slavery's morality, but in the darkness of Mammoth Cave he begins to change his views. Bradbury's plot falters a bit at the end, when a posse of men seems more bumbling than harmful, but she will hold readers throughout with a consistent third-person perspective focused through Elias and his gradual character development, not on the glories of the cave. Several pages of backmatter give insight into the history of the cave and the real Dr. Croghan, with suggestions for further reading. A solid look at a fascinating historical side note. (Kirkus Reviews April 15, 2015) In 1842, Dr. John Croghan believed that patients suffering from consumption could be cured by special diets and the cool, damp air

found in Kentucky's Mammoth Cave. In this book, one of his patients is 12-year-old Elias Harrigan, who befriends slaves working in the cave and is unknowingly drawn into another patient's (Pennyrile's) dubious scheming. When Elias begins to feel better, he joins the slaves as they make their rounds delivering food and conducting tours of the cave. Finding himself deeper in the cave than he ever anticipated, he stumbles upon a shocking situation that links back to Pennyrile. Caught in the middle of a life-and-death circumstance, Elias must decide whether he will risk everything or walk away. Drawing upon the real-life figures of Dr. Croghan and three of Mammoth Cave's slaves (Stephen Bishop, Nick Brandsford, and Mat Brandsford), Elias's story makes history come alive. An adventure-laden celebration of nineteenth-century medical innovation and important African American contributions to the charting of the largest cave system in the world. (Booklist April 15, 2015) Twelve-year-old Elias is sent from his Virginia home to Dr. Croghan's experimental hospital located within the Mammoth Caves of Kentucky, in the hopes that he can be cured of consumption (tuberculosis). In this pre-Civil War setting, patients are served by slaves, who also lead cave tours. When Elias surreptitiously follows a slave named Stephen into a tunnel, he discovers a network of secret tunnels that house a hidden community of runaway slaves. When a patient and former boat crew member, Pennyrile, gets suspicious and begins investigating, the runaway slaves must quickly hide their existence. The slaves forced to work at the Mammoth Cave protect their pride and dignity in multifaceted manners. Stephen and another slave named Jonah play jokes on the white tourists, such as making them believe that they have encountered a ghost. Descriptions of Dr. Croghan's primitive medical treatments, such as intentional bleeding, forced vomiting, and homemade instruments, illustrate the painful and fruitless state of health care for tuberculosis patients at that time. A further reading section describes the author's personal connection to the story, provides additional titles, and includes details about the real-life characters in the story and the treatment of tuberculosis. This work boasts richly developed African American characters and extraordinary settings. VERDICT Recommended for libraries wanting to expand their historical fiction collection. —Jennifer Schultz, Fauquier County Public Library, Warrenton, VA (School Library Journal May 2015) Twelve-year-old Elias awakens one day in a cave. Sent from his home in Norfolk, Virginia, to Kentucky, he is suffering from tuberculosis, and rumors of Doc Croghan's healing powers • is it the cave, the diet, the water? • are spreading. But what is truth and what is fiction? Surely, the all-egg diet Elias is prescribed cannot be doing the trick, but he is healing. As he does, he befriends slaves Stephen, Nick, and Jonah, who tend to his needs and his spirit. There are secrets in the cave, and neighboring patient Pennyroyal

seems determined to discover them. Does Pennyroyal have ulterior motives beyond his own failing health? And what are Stephen, Nick, and Jonah really up to? Bradbury's *River Runs Deep* rewards readers who make the effort to plumb its depths. Elias spends much of his time in the literal and figurative dark in Bradbury's finely crafted novel. Set in the 1800s, this is a period piece of literary fiction where form meets function. In the dark, Elias interacts with characters who are shrouded in mystery and hidden motives. They necessarily remain flat until the true mysteries of Mammoth Cave come to light. Then, events unravel at breakneck pace, and the reader's patience is rewarded with an exciting story based on America's real past. This is a novel for teachers to give their students to inform them of two of the biggest social issues of the nineteenth century.

• Jim Nicosia. (VOYA June 2015)

In the early nineteenth century, both cause and reliable cure for tuberculosis were unknown, and any number of nostrums and treatments seemed, for desperate sufferers, to be worth a try. Thus twelve-year-old Elias ends up at the "hospital" of Dr. Croghan, deep in Kentucky's Mammoth Cave, where the doctor believes patients will benefit from its vapors. Elias does, in fact, get better quickly, but not thanks to the vapors. Rather, the slaves who work in the cave as hospital assistants and tour guides slip water from a cave river into his diet. While Croghan rejoices in his model patient's rapid recovery and ponders why other sufferers aren't experiencing the same success, Mr. Pennyroyal, a patient in an advanced stage of the disease, suspects both the source of the healing water and a community of runaway slaves hiding in the caves. He pressures Elias into aiding his plot to secure his cure, capitalize financially on the remedy, and claim the bounty on the slaves, all in one high-stakes gamble. Although Bradbury's tale is largely speculative, the possibility of each plot point is credible and the cast, from Croghan to the African-American tour guides, is drawn from real life. Mr. Pennyroyal's schemes add a fair amount of tension to the intriguing story, and Elias's grappling with the morality of slavery is both thoughtful and realistic. The cave itself (map included) enjoys a featured role, and readers up for a satisfying fusion of historical fiction, conspiracy, and survival will want to explore. (Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books September 2015)

Bradbury's newest novel juxtaposes a boy's fight against tuberculosis with a historical tale of survival, all set against the magnificent backdrop of Mammoth Cave in mid-19th century Kentucky. When Elias is diagnosed with consumption, his terrified mother sends him to a clinic in Mammoth Cave. The cave is supposedly imbued with magical healing vapors. Elias's three weeks in the cave are filled with disgusting food and endless hours of boredom, occasionally relieved by his knot-tying practice. Everything changes when the ghost arrives. Elias's determination to uncover the mystery behind the ghostly voice leads him

deeper into the caves and deeper into trouble. Bradbury's meticulous research, both concerning the layout of the cave and the real-life tuberculosis hospital that existed there, are deftly intertwined with a compelling story, creating a jewel of a knot for readers to unravel. Chapter titles and an author's note round out the story. Michaela Schied, Teacher Librarian, Indian River Middle School, Philadelphia, New York [Editor's Note: Available in e-book format.] Recommended (School Library Connection January 2016) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Bradbury captures a piece of history in this enchanting tale. Set in historical Mammoth Cave, the legends of this wondrous location meet up with trials of the 1800s-- tuberculosis, slavery-- this story has it all!

Excellent historical fiction! The depth of research of place and time is evident. Through the eyes of twelve year old Elias, I explored Kentucky's Mammoth Cave in a time when cave vapors were thought to heal consumption and caves held secrets.

In RIVER RUNS DEEP by Jennifer Bradbury, 12-year-old Elias is sent to Dr. Cogan's experimental underground hospital in Mammoth Cave, Kentucky to receive treatment for consumption (which today is called tuberculosis). The vapors from the cave are said to have healing properties. Some people do get better; many don't. In addition to housing the hospital, the cave is a natural wonder that attracts tourists and a hide-out for runaway slaves. Even though slaves lead tourists through the caves, the tourists don't know their true identities or anything about the patients. Elias is warned to not wander through the cave by himself, but being a young, restless boy with a curious nature, he follows Stephen, one of the slaves, and inadvertently discovers the runaways. I really enjoyed reading this story. I had never heard of Dr. Cogan or the TB "clinic" that was set up inside Mammoth Cave; I think it's a fascinating bit of history. As with all historical fiction, Bradbury mixed fiction and facts, and did so successfully. I also liked Bradbury's writing style; she seamlessly weaves together several story lines --- that of the doctor and his clinic, Elias and his illness, the mystery of the hidden slaves and the mystery of why one of the patients, Mr. Pennyroyal is so interested in the water in the caves. All in all, RIVER RUNS DEEP is easy to read and packed with a lot of info and a lot of action, making the book a real page-turner. Reviewed by Christine M. Irvin

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I don't review books often, but this one deserves more reviews. We visited Mammoth Cave earlier this year, and besides being an amazing geographic site, the history of the cave is intriguing. That's why this book jumped out at me. It's a captivating book about the history of the cave as a sanatorium, with a great glimpse into the slavery issues of the 1840's. I don't want to give any more away, so I'll leave it at that. But I do wonder if I might have just read a book that will be nominated for a Newberry Award...

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