

Young Adult Book Discussion Kits

Young Adult Book Discussion Kits are available to library patrons for use by home and community discussion groups, as well as teachers in the classroom setting. Each kit contains a set of thirty identical soft-cover books accompanied by a book discussion guide. The guides feature information about the author, reviews of the book, discussion questions, suggested further readings, and other pertinent information. Each kit is packaged in a canvas tote bag and may be borrowed for six weeks.

Young Adult Book Discussion Kits may be reserved and sent to the library branch of your choice for pick up. If you would like to reserve a kit, please stop by your local library branch or call **574-1611**. The kits may also be reserved through our website **www.lfpl.org**. A list of all the kits may be found in the LFPL catalog by typing **Book Discussion Kit Young Adult** at the title prompt.



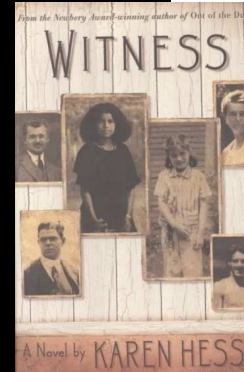
Children's & Young Adult Services
301 York Street
Louisville, KY 40203
502-574-1620

Information for this flyer was partially gathered from the following resources:

<http://www.amazon.com/> (6/6/03).

"Karen Hesse," *Authors and Books*. Scholastic. <http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/authorstudies/authorstudies.jhtml> (6/6/03).

"Karen Hesse," in *Contemporary Authors*. Gale Literary Databases. <http://galenet.gale.com> (6/6/03).



A Reader's Guide to
Young Adult Book
Discussion Kit #234
Witness
By Karen Hesse

Xtreme Reads
Xtreme Reads
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Xtreme Reads
Xtreme Reads

**Young Adult Book
Discussion Kits**



The year is 1924 and the Klan has come to small town Vermont. Emotions run high and danger is in the air. For two young girls, one African-American and the other Jewish, it could not be a more frightening time.

About the Author

Karen Hesse has always loved books. When she was a young girl she would climb the apple tree in her back yard and there, she says, “cradled in the boughs of the tree, I spent hours reading.” Another place Hesse spent a lot of time was her local library where she read everything she could get her hands on. As a teenager she began to read adult novels and says that the book that changed her life was *Hiroshima* by John Hersey. She says that when “... [she] closed the covers of *Hiroshima*, [she] closed the door on [her] childhood.”

In 1971 Hesse got married and, while living in Norfolk, Virginia, she began to write poetry and give readings and by the mid 1980s she had begun to write children’s books. Her first book to be published was *Wish on a Unicorn*, which was published in 1991. The inspiration for Hesse’s work comes from real life experiences and from the world she has observed on her travels.

Today Karen Hesse lives in Brattleboro, Vermont with her husband and daughters. She loves to write and “can’t wait to get to [her] desk every morning.” Of her young adult audience, she says that there isn’t anyone else she’d rather write for: “young readers are the most challenging, demanding, and rewarding of audiences,” and she strives to provide her readers with substance and material that will challenge.

What the Critics Say...

“*Witness* haunts the reader with its poetically stark verse and multiple voices.”
- *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*

“... a quietly moving, powerful novel.”
- *School Library Journal*

“Hesse’s spare writing leaves space for readers to imagine more about that time and about their own.”
- *Booklist*

“... a book about people’s ‘capacity for love and hate,’ which ‘includes some quiet yet irreducible moments that resonate long after the book is put down.’”
- *School Library Journal*

Awards and Recognition

1992 Poetry Society of Vermont
1998 Newbery Medal for *Out of the Dust*
1998 Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction for *Out of the Dust*
2002 Christopher Award for *Witness*

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does telling a story from 11 points of view make it different from just one point of view?
- 2) Sara Chickering says of the Klan: “There’s a kind of power they wield, a deceptive authority.” (pg. 56) What does she mean by a deceptive authority? Why does the Klan burn crosses and hide their identity behind hoods and sheets? (question provided by www.scholastic.com)
- 3) Which of the characters do you feel exhibits true courage? Explain.
- 4) What would you do if you were the only witness to an incident that resulted in the harm of others?
- 5) Discuss Merlin Van Tornhout. Do you think he had changed by the end of the book, or did he simply find his true self by the end of the story?
- 6) Do you think any or all of the events that occurred in this story could happen today? Explain.
- 7) In what ways can you relate to any of the characters?
- 8) Other than racism, what are some of the other themes that you discovered in this story?

Suggested Titles for Further Reading

Nothing But the Truth: A Documentary Novel
by Avi (YP)

Mississippi Trial, 1955
by Chris Crow(YP)

White Romance
by Virginia Hamilton (YP)

Spite Fences
by Trudy Krisher (YP)

To Kill a Mocking Bird
by Harper Lee (YP)

Music from a Place Called Half Moon
by Jerrie Oughton (YP)

If You Come Softly
by Jacqueline Woodson (YP)