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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek** by Kim Michele Richardson

#### Summary

In 1936, tucked deep into the woods of Troublesome Creek, KY, lives blue-skinned 19-year-old Cussy Carter, the last living female of the rare Blue People ancestry. The lonely young Appalachian woman joins the historical Pack Horse Library Project of Kentucky and becomes a librarian, riding across slippery creek beds and up treacherous mountains on her faithful mule to deliver books and other reading material to the impoverished hill people of Eastern Kentucky.

Along her dangerous route, Cussy, known to the mountain folk as Bluet, confronts those suspicious of her damselfly-blue skin and the government's new book program. She befriends hardscrabble and complex fellow Kentuckians, and is fiercely determined to bring comfort and joy, instill literacy, and give to those who have nothing, a bookly respite, a fleeting retreat to faraway lands.

#### Discussion Questions

1. The Kentucky Pack Horse program was implemented in 1935 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to create women's work programs and to assist economic recovery and build literacy. Looking at the novel, how did the program affect the people in this remote area? Do you think library programs are still a vital part of our society today?
2. How has a librarian or book lover impacted your life? Have you ever connected with a book or author in a meaningful way? Explain.
3. Missionaries, government, social workers, and various religious groups have always visited eastern Kentucky to reform, modernize, and mold hill folk to their acceptable standards. Do you think Cussy faced this kind of prejudice from the outside world? Is there any prejudice or stigma associated with the people of Appalachia today?
4. How do you think Cussy's father feels after he marries her off to an abusive man? Why do you think he agrees to Charlie Frazier's proposal in the first place? What do you imagine life was like for an unwed woman at that time?

5. Imagine you are making a community scrapbook like the ones Cussy distributes to the people of Troublesome. What would you include? Do you think these materials were helpful to Cussy's library patrons?
6. When Cussy receives the cure for her blueness from Doc, she realizes there's a price to pay for her white skin, and the side effects soon become too much to handle. If you were in Cussy's shoes, would you sacrifice your health for a chance at "normalcy"? If there weren't any side effects, do you think Cussy would have continued to take the medication? Would you?
7. How do you think Cussy feels when she is ostracized at the Independence Day celebration, despite her change of skin color? Can you relate to her feelings of isolation? Do you think these kinds of racial prejudices are still prevalent today?
8. Cussy has to deal with the loss of many loved ones in a very short amount of time. How do you think she handles her grief? Which loss was the most difficult for you to read?
9. What do you think life was like for the people of Troublesome? What are some of the highlights of living in such a remote place? What are some of the challenges the people on Cussy's library route face?
10. Back then, entering into a prohibited or interracial marriage in Kentucky was a misdemeanor that could result in incarceration, and we see these racial tensions attempt to sever Cussy and Jackson's relationship. Discuss antimiscegenation laws and marriage laws. Do you think this kind of prejudice still exists toward interracial couples?
11. What do you think happens to Cussy, Jackson, Honey, and the other inhabitants of Troublesome after the story ends? Imagine you were Cussy. How would you feel leaving Troublesome for good?

Summary from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com).  
Discussion Questions from [www.litlovers.com](http://www.litlovers.com).