



Cotton In My Sack

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Joanda's family are sharecroppers growing cotton in Arkansas. The children share in a life of hard work and poverty. A revealing tale of life among the sharecroppers, tenants, and farm-owners in cotton country.

Cotton In My Sack Details

Date : Published 1949 by J.B. Lippincott

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Author : Lois Lenski

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From Reader Review Cotton In My Sack for online ebook

Gale says

EVERYONE INVOLVED IN COTTON IS POOR...

Encouraged by the invitation of Arkansas children who enjoyed her *STRAWBERRY GIRL*, Lois Lenski responded to the literary call to visit and study life in the cotton fields of Eastern Arkansas. Rich in alluvial soil from the Mississippi and bayou this region provided an unreliable living for bosses, tenant farmers and sharecroppers, for it required grit and the faith of desperation to stick it out one miserable year after another. How can folks plan to get ahead if they live hand to mouth and have never learned the art of saving or the value of present sacrifice for future advantage?

The Hutley family consists of five children but focuses on 10-year-old Joanda for two years. This plucky girl, who spoils her baby sister, sees more than most girls her age--more heartbreak, hope, pain and disaster. It is her love of books, however, which impresses her kind teacher, who in turn struggles to elevate the lifestyle of her sharecropper students and vicariously their families.

Lenski's Readers will experience and understand the cotton croppers in order to better appreciate the fate of America's rural poor. An easy read with evocative illustrations by the author who captured every detail for the eye--and the heart.

Check out the impressive list of Lenski's YA books if you are curious to consider a literary patchwork of America's agrarian families, who remain rich in spirit.

(June 15, 2012. I welcome dialogue with teachers.)

Elizabeth S says

Again, we learn a little about cotton picking sharecroppers and what it takes to get ahead. A 10-year-old girl is the focus of the story. While we learn about her, she learns about "rich folk" who may also have debts and troubles.

Sandra Muir says

My dad gave this book to me for Christmas one year and I read it over and over.

Cruse says

I enjoyed the book because the author put so much time into getting the details accurate. The story she tells is exactly like the ones my Daddy told about hand picking cotton, weighing up and the contests to see who

could pick the most in a day. Also Daddy told about everybody going to town on Saturday and the men all getting drunk. She got the share croppers and the tenant farmers right as well as the general mentality of the people of that time. I used this book as a teaching tool in social studies.

Courtney says

I wish I had read this while my grandparents were still living. This would have been akin to their experiences growing up and I wish I could inquire for further details for comparison's sake. They both grew up on Arkansas cotton farms, not too far the setting of the book, and I know my grandpa grew up living the tenant farming existence as described in the story. My grandma told me she liked to ride on top of the cotton in the wagon when they took it to the gin just like Joanda and her siblings did.

Familial comparisons aside, I think this and Judy's Journey are my favorite of the American Regional series. I love that Cotton In My Sack allowed the characters to have hope at the end and goals were set and pursued to improve their lives. This isn't always true of her other books. While I know Lenski is capturing authenticity and doesn't sugarcoat, it was nice to see dreams believed attainable and wisdom gained and applied in spite of numerous setbacks.

Taylor says

Lois Lenski did this wonderful series about working children in America. They are somewhat out of date (they usually take place in the first half of the 20th century) but that doesn't make them less moving. Also, issues of poverty and class are ALWAYS relevant, and books like Cotton in My Sack and Strawberry Girl do a wonderful job of getting that conversation going with a young person.

I read this at the same time as Nickle and Dimed and there were plenty of disturbing parallels. It was very interesting to come at the same general concepts from an adult-non-fiction perspective and a children's-historical-fiction perspective simultaneously. Certainly multitudes of thought provoking moments.

And of course, the pages are full of wonderful Lenski illustrations. So charming.

carrietracy says

This is a completely fascinating look at Arkansas cotton workers in the forties that comes complete with numerous lessons on economics. How Lenski managed to pack all this into a children's book that is still actually accessible to children is beyond me.

Jasmine Roberson says

has to do with picking cotton- the story of a little girl- story of a family and independence

Latharia says

My 3rd grade teacher, Mrs. Rothgeb, gave me this book. It's been ages since I read it & when I was debating putting it out in my book exchange, I realized I wanted to read it again. It's a wonderful story, set in the late 1940's in Arkansas cotton picking country. The children in the story work hard & learn lots of valuable life lessons, but it never feels like a moral tale. Although it has some dated references, it's a wonderful retrospective on life during this era, and I'd recommend it to kids who are starting to read chapter books, even now, in 2008!

Kari says

Now this is about the lowest kind of book I like to read. There's serious stuff in here, but through the whole thing the direction is looking up. It still kind of depressed me to read, but this is in a whole different class from too many other kid books. It did seem to meander more than other Lenski books I've read, with several stories all being told at the same time instead of everything wrapping up nicely in one incident. That's usually okay with me, but here it did seem a little stranger than normal.

Lesa says

One of the few books that I have read over and over (other than any Dr. Seuss book I could get my hands on in 1st grade). As a 10 year old little girl, I discovered Lowis Lenski and she wrote of real worlds rather than the idealized one that was in most children's books. I could relate to the characters and read many of her books, but this was the one that I returned to over and over. If the book is still in the Sydney Deener Elementary School Library, it probably still has a card in it with my name on it line after line after line! :-)

Lobstergirl says

This is one of Lois Lenski's *American Regional Series*, about a dirt poor, cotton-picking white sharecropper family in Arkansas. After writing *Strawberry Girl*, Lenski was invited by Arkansas children who had heard it dramatized on the radio to come to cotton country. She spent time there in 1947 and wrote and illustrated this fictionalized account of the hardscrabble life.

Donna Gabbard says

Reading this through the eyes of an adult, I had to give it 3 stars. Not sure what my star rating would have been as a young reader.....maybe 3 1/2? Was surprised at the subtle hint of the father's drinking habit. I'm pretty sure that would have gone unnoticed by me as a child in the early 1970's.

Judy says

This is the sixth book in Lois Lenski's American Regional Series. I missed it when reading the list of books from 1949, so I am adding it now. I also missed posting The Family Read yesterday, but since today is a school holiday, I am getting away with it!

Joanda's family are white share croppers in the cotton fields of Louisiana. The cotton grows almost right up to the walls of their tiny shack. To keep their lives going, the whole family picks cotton or helps in some way appropriate to their size and age. In this story whites, blacks, adults and children labor side by side and mostly in harmony.

The family subsists on money borrowed from the boss man, which they call "furnish." When the crop comes in they get paid, minus the money they have already borrowed. Usually by the time winter is over, they have run out of food and coal so must live on biscuits and beans, but it is the time when the children can go to school. During the growing season, when they do have money, the best day of the week is Saturday which they spend in town shopping.

As is usual in Lois Lenski's books, the Hutley family is the one that breaks out of this cycle of poverty and makes a better life due to hard work and a good bit of luck. The life of this family comes alive on the pages and in the illustrations. Joanda, though plucky and smart, has her share of worries and unfortunate events which she has to deal with by herself. Her father is always busy and her mother is overworked and in ill health, so Joanda also keeps watch over her baby sister, whom she loves to death.

My favorite book in the American Regional Series is Strawberry Girl, which won the Newbery Award. I don't remember reading Cotton in My Sack as a child but reading it now, I liked it just as well as Strawberry Girl. These days any kid can find out about the lives of other kids around the country and the world on television and the internet, so I like to think of Lois Lenski as a writer who had the vision to get this information out to children all on her own through books alone. It was an amazing feat on her part.

Robin says

I don't remember too much about this one other than that I liked it a lot and when it seemed like everyone else was reading Strawberry Girl to the point that I felt I may have (haven't yet but I do have a copy) I read this one instead. If you like trying other books that are somewhat like Side B of the record. Think I dated myself with that wording! Anyway, if you're up for some nostalgia or need something different for your kids or grandkids I suggest giving this one a try.

RocknRobn says

I read this book at a pre-teen back in the 70s and adored it. I probably re-read it 5 times. I remember being so enthralled with the story and how this little girl lived....so different from me. I have never forgotten the story despite 40 years having passed. And I count this book as one of the ones that made me fall in love with reading.

Howard says

This is a children's book that I first read when I was in the second grade. I have never forgotten it or the long days in which there was cotton in my sack. A couple of years ago I purchased a copy on Ebay, thinking that perhaps my grand children might want to read it someday, but I don't think there is much chance of that.

Brian Bates says

loved this book every bit as much or more than the strawberry girl. a classic story of a working class family finding joy in every day toil and hardships.

Book Club Mom says

Realistic fiction about young Joanda Hutley and her sharecropper family, cotton pickers in Arkansas during the late 1940s. The Hutleys endure many ups and downs and live from payday to payday, often squandering their money in town every Saturday, and leaving little for groceries and coal to heat their house. Tractor accidents, illness, stolen cotton and other problems keep the Hutleys locked in place, until Uncle Shine Morse shows them how they must pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

Despite their hardships, Joanda and her family work together and are a cheerful and loving group, which makes it a remarkably charming story. Neighbors look out for each other and even the boss man's wife turns out to be nice, making the story both a dose of reality and an example of the goodness in people.

Lenski is both the author and the illustrator of Cotton in My Sack and her unique illustrations show the family during the good and the bad, adding much to the story's realism.

Cotton in My Sack is one of my favorite girlhood books. Reading it again makes me understand how my reading tastes have developed, as I have always loved stories about large families and their struggles. It reminds me now of a combination of the Little House on the Prairie books by Laura Ingalls Wilder and also a little bit of The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck. I like how the author doesn't gloss over the hard times but also shows the family's resilience and optimism.

Lois Lenski wrote and illustrated many regional children's books, and she won a Newbery Medal in 1946 for Strawberry Girl. She wrote Cotton in My Sack at the request of children in Arkansas, who had read, Strawberry Girl and wanted her to write a book about them.

Steve Hemmeke says

A children's story set in Arkansas, written in 1949.

A sharecropper family learns the value of saving money, neighborly help, and caring for their possessions, in spite of setbacks like fires, heart attacks and near drownings. They move from apathy, indulgence and

despair to the dignity of ownership and self improvement.

All this is put in language children can understand, which is its strength.

Lenski is weak in smooth and engaging prose and dialogue. Transitions are choppy.

4 stars for content, two for style.
