

YHBA Novel Resource

Alabama Moon
Watt Key
Farrar Straus Giroux
2006

Amy Nelson

About the Author



www.WattKey.com

Watt Key lives in Southern Alabama with his wife and three children. This is first novel. Watt spent his winters building tree forts, hunting, fishing, and trapping in the swamp. He also told his brothers stories about “Old Smelly”, a made-up character that stunk and exploded whenever he ate anything. Watt currently owns some swamp lands in the Alabama River delta that is only accessible by small boat.

Alabama Moon is Watt Key’s first novel.

Honors for *Alabama Moon*!:

Booklist - Starred Review
KLIATT - Starred Review
Kirkus Reviews
Horn Book
VOYA - Top of the Top Shelf Fiction 2006
Publishers Weekly
School Library Journal

Email: wkey@wattkey.com
Watt Key
c/o Farrar, Straus, and Giroux
19 Union Square West
New York, NY 10003

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Annotation

Ten-year old Moon Blake faces the death of his father from whom he has learned everything he needs to survive. Moon and his father live in the forests of Alabama alone because of his father's hatred of the government. After his father's death, Moon is determined to go to Alaska to find other people who hate the government as well.

Unfortunately, his plan is foiled by Constable Sanders who puts moon in jail and then a boys' home. After escaping the boys' home, Moon and two friends, Hal and Kip, hide out in the Talladega National Forest. Hal eventually returns home with his father, and Kip is forced to go to the hospital due to illness.

After more adventures, Moon finally gets his day in court and is able to make a home with his Aunt and Uncle in the city of Mobile.

There is quite a bit of violence in this novel: especially fighting and the use of guns. In my opinion, these issues were not always handled in a responsible manner. There are little or no consequences. There is a lot of rough language and even drunk driving that educators and parents might find objectionable.

There is some mention of the Vietnam War and how it influenced Moon's father to lead an isolated/militia lifestyle. These two issues should have been handled in more depth and understanding. This background context is not in the book, and should have been. Many of Moon's adventures and survival tactics seem implausible, especially for someone of just ten years old.

Genre:

Historical Fiction/Children's Chapter Book/Adventure

Point of View:

Alabama Moon is written from the point of view of the main character: Moon Blake. This book is in first person.

Theme:

The theme of *Alabama Moon* includes finding friendship: even if the person is bigger than you, or always sick. There is also the coming of age aspect: learning to think for yourself and not taking everything your parents say for granted.

Title: *Alabama Moon* is taken from the title characters name "Moon"; he is living in the state of Alabama.

Conflict:

The internal conflict consisted of Moon's own experience of life versus his father anti-government stance. There is also person conflict between Moon and Constable Sanders.

Resolution

After making friends with Hal and Kip and then get getting help from lawyer Mr. Wellington, Moon starts to learn to think for himself. The conflict with Constable Sanders is resolved by his going to jail for perjury and his active against Moon.

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Characters

Moon Blake: ten year old main character

Pap: Moon's father: does not like the government

Mr. Wellington: lawyer; lives in near Moon

Mr. Abroscotto: owns the store near Moon's home

Constable Sanders: local law enforcement that is mean to Moon

Mr. Carter: Security at Pinson, the boys home

Hal Mitchell: older boy Moon meets at Pinson

Kit Slip : Moon's first friend, and is sick

Mrs. Broomstead: cook at Pinson, that cuts Moon's hair

Mrs. Crutcher: a teacher at Pinson

Mr. Mitchell: Hal's dad

Uncle Mike and Aunt Sara: Moon's relatives from Mobile that decide to take care of him.

Setting

The setting of *Alabama Moon* is the woods of Alabama in the 1980's. This book takes place in the course of several months.

Interest Level:

12-15 years old

Reading Level:

9-12 years old

Booktalk

There's nothing better than a good survival story, and author Watt Key has written a good one. It's 1980, and Moon Blake has never been to school, had a sleepover, or eaten at McDonald's. That's because his Pap, a disgruntled Vietnam veteran who distrusts the government, has raised him entirely in the deep woods. Moon knows how to shoot and skin a deer, and how to make a shelter out of sticks and pine needles, but has no clue how to interact with anyone other than his Pap. So when Pap has an accident and subsequently dies, Moon is left on his own, and is quickly taken into custody by the state. However, he surprises everyone when he not only busts out of the toughest boys' home in Alabama, but takes a busload of boys with him, determined to live free or die trying. *Alabama Moon* is both a deep-hearted adventure story and a study of a boy you will soon come to root for.

Discussion Questions

Chapters 1-10

Pre-Reading:

I would use Anticipation Guide, and also look at a map of the United States to locate Alabama and Alaska--what is the differences between the two? What is the distance between the two?

During:

1. What does Pap hate? (5)
2. Where does Moon live? (4-6)
3. Describe Pap's accident. (17)
4. Why won't Pap get help? (18-21)
5. Why does Moon want to go to Alaska? (20)
6. Why does Moon go to Mr. Wellington's Lodge? (34)
7. Why is jail good? (49)

Post Reading:

Draw Moon's home.

Were Pap's actions helpful or harmful to Moon?

Chapters 11-20

Pre-Reading:

Research what it means to be "Property of the State".

During:

1. Who is Moon's first friend? (77)
2. How did Moon's first day of school go? (84-87)
3. Why does Moon trade places with Hal? (91)
4. Do you think that it is plausible that they could break out of Pinson? (102)
5. Where do the boys go after leaving Pinson? (106)
6. Who's Snapper? (117)

Post-Reading:

Get a map of Talladega National Forest, and track Moon's movements

Chapters 21-30

Pre-Reading:

Do you think that Constable Sanders will catch Moon? What will happen if he does?

During:

1. Why is Kit sick? (127)
2. Why does Moon and Kit not want Hal to go? Why does he want to go? (139)
3. Do you think that Sanders is lost? Why or why not? (150-153)

Post-Reading:

Why do you think that Kit is so agreeable with Moon? Why do you think that Sanders will not give up finding Moon?

Chapters 31-40

Pre-Reading:

Why is Moon having second thoughts about going to Alaska? Do you think he'll ever make it there?

During:

1. What event starts Moon doubting his father? (181)
2. Why does Moon want to go back to his home? (193)

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3. Why would Moon rather go to Hellenweiler than go live in the woods? (209)
4. Who helps Moon get away for Sanders? (225)

Post-Reading:

Research the effects of the Vietnam War on soldiers returning home.

Chapters 41-51

Pre-Reading:

Why is Mr. Wellington helping Moon?

During:

1. What is Moon being accused of? (238)
2. What does the judge think of Sanders? (250-256)
3. What happens to Sanders? (262)
4. Who helped prove Sanders was lying? (262)
5. Who is going to take care of Moon? (264)
6. What happened to Kit? (278)

Post-Reading:

How is Moon different than his father?

Vocabulary:

Bluff (3): a high steep cliff

Tangled (4): a twisted mass

Palmetto (5): a kind of palm with fan-shaped leaves

Gallberry (11): either of two North American shrubs, having glossy leaves, white flowers, and berries

Muscadine: (13) a grape of the southern U.S., having dull purple, thick-skinned musky fruit and being the origin of many grape varieties

Fidgeted (15): to move about restlessly

Moccasins (17): a soft leather shoe made of deer skin with no heel.

Constable (24): a police officer

Homestead (26): public land granted to settle under certain conditions by the government

Joggled (38): to shake slightly

Queasiness (39): uneasy or uncomfortable

Slough (42): an area of soft, muddy ground; swamp or swamplike region

Tarpaulin (43): a sheet of canvas, plastic, or other strong waterproof material used as a protective covering.

Assault (52): a sudden attack

Militia (56): an army of citizens who are not regular soldiers but who are trained for war.

Poached (56): to trespass on another's land, especially to hunt or fish

Provoke (68): to make angry

Suspicious (84): inclined to suspect, esp. inclined to suspect evil; distrustful

Sloshed: (115): splash in mud or water

Kudzu (115): a fast-growing Chinese and Japanese climbing vine

Indiana Academic Standards (content):

Language Arts: 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.4, 6.3.2, 6.3.4
7.1.1, 7.3.2, 7.3.4, 7.3.9
8.1.1, 8.1.3, 8.3.2, 8.3.4

Anticipation Guide

Before		Alabama Moon	After	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		There are some families that live in the woods, hiding from everyone.		
		Some kids would rather live on their own than go to school.		
		Food in jail tastes good.		
		Ten year olds cannot trap and cook their own food.		
		You have to believe what your parents believe.		

Read-Aloud:

Read Aloud #1

Chapter 5: Page 3: first two paragraphs “I was ten years old and he’d taught me everything that I needed to know about living out in the forest.”

This is a great introduction to the novel; this read aloud works well with the Anticipatory Statements. This opening is also a good one to come back to after finishing the book to compare how Moon’s attitude changes throughout the novel.

Read Aloud #2

Chapter 27: Page 154-159. “What if he shoots us, Moon?”

This passage exemplifies the danger that faced Moon, his resilience, and the strong bonds of friendship he has forged since his father’s death.

If You Liked Alabama Moon, by Watt Key, You Might Also Like.....

* **My Side of the Mountain** by *Jean Craighead George*

A young boy relates his adventures during the year he spends living alone in the Catskill Mountains

* **Julie of the Wolves** by *Jean Craighead George*

While running away from home and an unwanted marriage, a thirteen-year-old Eskimo girl becomes lost on the North Slope of Alaska and is befriended by a wolf pack

* **Where the Red Fern Grows** by *Wilson Rawls*

A young boy living in the Ozarks achieves his heart's desire when he becomes the owner of two redbone hounds and teaches them to be champion hunters.

* **Run with the Horsemen** by *Ferrol Sams*

A boy's account of growing up in the South during the depression era.

Across Curriculum Connections:

Art: Be the Illustrator

Good readers make pictures in their minds as they read. This is a chance to share some of your own images and visions. Draw a picture related to the reading you have just done. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flowchart, etc. You can draw a picture of something that happened in your book, or something that the reading reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the reading

Standards Art: 6.1.3, 6.1.4, 6.6.3, 6.8.3, 6.9.4
7.6.3, 7.6.4, 7.9.1, 7.9.3
8.6.4, 8.9.3, 8.9.6

Supplies: Construction paper, Pencils, Crayons, ect.

Social Studies: Vietnam War

After reading Alabama Moon, students working in small groups, adopting the perspective of members of a group involved in the war (e.g., soldier, nurse, doctor, photojournalist, TV reporter) and conduct Internet research to explore how that particular group was affected. What was the effect of the Vietnam War on the particular group?

Learning about the soldiers, doctors, nurses, photographers, and other who took part in the war and applying that knowledge in an imaginative, creative format helps students make connections to literature and the past.

Based on the information from the paragraph(s) you've read, ask students to brainstorm possible questions that someone could answer by reading the information. Sample questions are included on the [Question Sheet](#). Sample Questions

What was the job of a military photographer?

What was the government's purpose in having military photographers?

What was shown in the photos of military photographers?

How were military photographers different from television and newspaper photographers?

Emphasize the difference between copying information from the site and creating original questions as you explore options.

Once you have gathered a list of potential questions, read over the list and make any revisions or additions.

Standards Social Studies: 6.2.1, 6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.2.6

None from grade 7 (Africa, Asia and Southwest Pacific)

None from grade 8 (US History until Reconstruction)

THEME: Vietnam War

Web Resources:

The Vietnam War

www.vietnamwar.com

THEME: Talladega National Forest

Web Resources:

Forest Service

www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama/aboutus/

THEME: Juvenile Court System

Web Resources:

Alabama Juvenile Court Liaison Initiative

www.ncmhjj.com/Blueprint/programs/AlabamaJuv.shtml

Resources:

* www.Vietnamwar.com

This site includes a section entitled “Life after the War”, a glossary of Vietnam War terms, and government sites.

*Talladega National Forest Map

Order by mail

Mail the Order Form and your check to the following address:

Attention: Public Affairs Maps
National Forests in Alabama
2946 Chestnut Street
Montgomery, AL 36107:

Book Activities:

1. Passage Picker

Your job is to pick parts of the story that you want to read aloud and talk about in your group.

These can be

- A good part
- An interesting part
- A funny part
- A scary part
- Some good writing
- A good description

Activity for individuals.

No teacher key

2. Study Sheet

To be done in small groups as a study guide.

(Highlighted answers)

Matching of characters-Match the following characters with their descriptions.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Mr. Carter (B) | A. Sanders' first dog |
| 2. Pinson (E) | B. Watchman at Pinson |
| 3. Sanders (G) | C. takes medicine, 1 st friend of Moon |
| 4. Mr. Gene (I) | D. Sanders' 2 nd dog |
| 5. Daisy (O) | E. boys' home in Tuscaloosa |
| 6. Mr. Wellington (L) | F.. Cook at Pinson, cut Moon's hair |
| 7. Mr. Abroscotto (K) | G. Mean constable |
| 8. Moon (J) | H. 1 st boy Moon fought at Pinson |
| 9. Hal (H) | I. gave Moon his 1 st car ride |
| 10. Mrs. Broomstead (F) | J. 10 yr. old main character |
| 11. Kit (C) | K owns store |
| 12. Snapper (A) | L lawyer; lives in cabin near Moon |
| 13. Sawbone (D) | M Hal's Dad |
| 14. Mr. Mitchell (M) | N Hospital where Kit is |
| 15. Bryant Memorial (N) | O another dog at Mr. Mitchell's place |

Multiple Choice

16. What did the boys at Pinson want to make Moon?
 - a. an outcast
 - b. president
 - c. escape victim
 - d. scapegoat
17. Pap called Moon's mom a....
 - a. Yellow finch
 - b. bluebird
 - c. swallow
 - d. mockingbird
18. What does Sanders's father do for a living?
 - a. police officer
 - b. lawyer
 - c. construction worker
 - d. judge
19. Pap died because.....
 - a. he loved to hunt
 - b. he refused medical attention
 - c. he wanted to die free
 - d. he broke his neck
20. Where does Pap want Moon to go?
 - a. Mr. Abroscotto's store
 - b. Atlanta
 - c. Alaska
 - d. Tuscaloosa

Short answer-Inference skills. Answer the following questions in paragraph form.

Answers may vary

21. Cause and Effect.
 - a. If the effect is Kit has a new sense of confidence, what is the cause? In other words, what happens to change Kit's confidence level? There will be more than one answer.
22. Describe Moon's leadership skills.
23. Was Moon's father a good father? What about Hal's father? Should Hal be allowed to stay with his father? Explain.
24. Knowing that Moon has lived his entire life in the wild with only the human contact of his father, how much do you believe in Moon's ability to socialize with Hal and Kit?
25. What qualities does Moon possess that make him successful in our world? What qualities make him unsuccessful?

Essay. In a well-developed five- paragraph essay, answer the following.

Answers may vary

Towards the end of Chapter 24, Hal decides to leave Moon and Kit and return home to his father. Read the following lines:

- a. *"We just need to get the shelter built. We've gotta get it built fast and get him comfortable. First thing in the mornin'...Then we've gotta get him some food he likes." I looked at Kit. "He'll stay then. Don't you think?" Kit looked at me and nodded quickly, but I could tell he wasn't sure. "He'll stay then," I repeated.*
- b. *"We're gonna have shelter tomorrow, and weapons, and deer meat. No school either!" Moon said. "Shut up, Moon!" Hal yelled. I grew sick with worry as Hal's words echoed in my head.*
- c. *"Hal, you know all that I said about not carin' who came? Dogs or people? Well, I like it that y'all came."
Hal looked down like he didn't know what to say.
"I cared who came," I said.
"Be honest with you, I could probably take all this for a while longer, but I wanna see my daddy..."
I didn't want him to go and I felt like crying, but I knew he was right.*

Reflect for a moment on how Moon is acting towards Hal. What can you infer Moon is feeling about Hal? How does this change the aspect of his character and how do you explain someone like Moon being capable of compassion and other feelings?

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