

The Aurora County All-Stars
By Deborah Wiles
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Sandpiper Books
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

About the Author

**Author's
Webpage**

www.deborahwiles.com



**Author's
Background**

Deborah Wiles grew up in a military household, which meant a lot of moving, both in and out of the United States. No matter where she was, she could always go to Mississippi and see her relatives who loved her. Deborah Wiles has four children (now grown) and two grandchildren. She realized how much she loved books as she read to her children when they were young. She now lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her cat named Gus.

**Other Books
by
Deborah Wiles**

**Each Little Bird That Sings*
**Freedom Summer* (Picture Book)
**Love, Ruby Lavender*
**One Wide Sky* (Picture Book)

Awards

*First children's author to be Writer-in-Residence at Thurber House
*Received the Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award in 2002
*Received the PEN/Phyllis Reynolds Naylor Working Writer Fellowship in 2004
*ALA Notable Children's Book for *Love, Ruby Lavender*
*Children's Book Sense 76 Pick
*New York Library Book for Reading and Sharing
**Love, Ruby Lavender* was also selected for twenty-six state book award reading lists
**One Wide Sky* was a Children's Book of the Month Club selection
**Freedom Summer* won many awards, including the Coretta Scott King/Stephoe award for the illustrator's (Jerome Lagarrigue) work.
**Each Little Bird That Sings* has won
the Bank Street Fiction Award for 2005

Golden Kite Honor Award
E.B. White Read Aloud Award in 2005
2005 National Book Award finalist

Annotation	House Jackson is a twelve-year old young boy who is the pitcher and captain of the Aurora County All-Stars, an unofficial baseball team that plays only one game each year. Last year, due to an unfortunate accident with Frances Schotz, House was unable to play in the game. This year, he is determined to do what it takes to pitch in the big game. While House struggles to avoid being in the Aurora County Birthday Pageant, scheduled to take place on the same date and time as the All-Stars game, he finds that there are lots of secrets in Aurora County. House himself has a big secret: he’s been reading books to “Mean Man Boyd” while his broken elbow healed. House and Frances learn a lot about each other, baseball, and the symphony true in this novel.
Genre	Realistic Fiction/Family Stories
Point of View	Third Person
Theme	There are a few themes in this novel. One is death/dying and coping with the loss of a loved one. Another is conquering the demons from your past, as House must “swallow the toad” that is Frances Schotz. The last theme is friendship and teamwork, as the entire baseball team and pageant crew learn to pull together and create a fabulous day for all.
Conflict	Internal conflict is present throughout the book as House must decide if and when to share his secret about spending time with Mr. Boyd. House’s internal conflicts continue as he also worries about seeing Frances Schotz again for the first time since his elbow was broken. Plenty of external conflict is woven throughout this novel, as well. House vs. Finesse, the baseball team vs. the pageant participants, The Aurora County All-Stars vs. The Raleigh Redbugs, House vs. Cleebo after a particularly awful fight. The overall external conflict is House and the baseball team vs. Finesse and the pageant. Both are scheduled for four o’clock on July Fourth, and the team is determined to play their game. Finesse is just as determined that the show must go on.
Conflict Resolution	The conflict is resolved when Finesse and House come to a mutual understanding. They decide that both the baseball game and the pageant can be combined into one wonderful performance that will make everyone happy.
Characters	House Jackson – House is a twelve-year old boy growing up in Mississippi with his father and little sister. Baseball is his one passion, and he’s been out of commission for the last year. The thing he wants more than anything is to beat the Raleigh Redbugs in their one official game. House is a leader who is not usually quite so outspoken. He has just healed from a severely broken elbow, only to have another injury to it during the big game. Honey Jackson – Honey is House’s six-year old little sister. She is precocious and longs to be a tap dancer in the pageant. She loves dogs and dancing and her big brother House. Cleebo Wilson – Cleebo is an African-American boy who loves baseball just as

much as House does. They are best friends who play together and eat together every day.

Frances “Finesse” Schotz – Frances is the fourteen-year old director of the pageant. She’s been away from Halleluia for the past year. She’s a skinny French-speaking dramatic girl who’s uncle is a famous actor. Frances is House’s archenemy because his elbow was broken in two places after they bumped into each other last summer.

Setting

The novel takes place in modern times in Halleluia, Mississippi, which is in Aurora County.

Interest Level and Reading Level

Interest Level – Grades 3 - 6

Reading Level – 4.5

Booktalk

The Aurora County All-Stars by Deborah Wiles is an engaging story about twelve-year old House Jackson. House is the captain and pitcher of the Aurora County All-Stars, a team that is unofficial, and only plays one game a year against the Raleigh Redbugs. In House’s small Mississippi town, events are happening that could prevent this one very important baseball game from happening. First, a mysterious recluse nicknamed “Mean-Man Boyd” passes away. House has a big secret about Mr. Boyd, and means to keep it that way. Next, the Aurora County Birthday Pageant celebrating the town’s 200th birthday is coming up. House and the team worry about the conflict of the pageant and their one and only baseball game, as both are scheduled for four o’clock on the Fourth of July. To make matters worse, House’s worst nightmare, Frances (now being called “Finesse”) is directing the pageant! And everyone on the baseball team has been signed up by their mothers to participate! How will House and the team find a solution to this problem in time to play their big game? Throughout the novel, you will be touched and entertained by the many interesting and unique citizens of Aurora County.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1 Pre-reading Question:

Have you ever had to do something you really didn’t want to do? Let’s brainstorm a list of things we’ve had to do.

Chapter 1 Post-reading Question:

Why do you think House didn’t stay on the phone with Miss Betty Ramsey?

Chapter 2 Pre-reading Question:

Why do you think House doesn’t want anyone to know he was at Mr. Boyd’s house when he died?

Chapter 2 Post-reading Question:

How could taking Honey to the pageant change House’s life more than witnessing Mr. Boyd’s death could change it?

Chapter 3 Pre-reading Question:

What is “just beginning?”

Chapter 3 Post-reading Question:

Why is House going back to Mr. Boyd's house alone at night?

Chapter 4 Pre-reading Question:
Is it the end for Eudora Welty?

Chapter 4 Post-reading Question:
Why does Mr. Boyd have the reputation and nickname "Mean Man Boyd?"

Chapter 5 Pre-reading Question:
What is the author's purpose of including Aurora County News sections in this book?

Chapter 5 Post-reading Question:
How do you think House and the ball players will deal with being in the pageant?

Chapter 6 Pre-reading Question:
How do you think the ball team feels to know that their mothers signed them up for the pageant when their game is so important to them?

Chapter 6 Post-reading Question:
Would you like to have a big brother like House? Why or why not?

Chapter 7 Post-reading Question:
Have you ever been as mad as House was in this chapter? When?

Chapter 8 Pre-reading Question:
Do you think House and Cleebo will "get" Finesse?

Chapter 8 Post-reading Question:
Why do you think House was avoiding playing baseball that afternoon?

Chapter 9 Pre-reading Question:
Who died?

Chapter 10 Pre-reading Question:
What could be a good solution to the problem of the pageant and the ball game being at the same time?

Chapter 10 Post-reading Question:
Why do you think Cleebo and House really fought in this chapter?

Chapter 11 Pre-reading Question:
Is there going to be a treasure?

Chapter 11 Post-reading Question:
Why do you think House dreamed about his mother?

Chapter 12 Post-reading Question:
How do you think House's mother knew Mr. Boyd?

Chapter 13 Pre-reading Question:
Who else could be in Mr. Boyd's house?

Chapter 13 Post-reading Question:
What did House learn about Mr. Boyd from Pip?

Chapter 14 Pre-reading Question:
Why do you think House might have loved Mr. Boyd?

Chapter 15 Pre-reading Question:
Do you think House's feelings about Frances will change?

Chapter 15 Post-reading Question:
Who could the body on the couch be?

Chapter 16 Pre-reading Question:

- Would you be brave enough to go in to Mr. Boyd's house? Why?
- Chapter 16 Post-reading Question:
Why do you think House didn't share Mr. Boyd's last words with Cleebo?
- Chapter 17 Post-reading Question:
What do you think "a symphony true" means?
- Chapter 18 Post-reading Question:
Predict how the boys will react to Ruby Lavender wanting to catch?
- Chapter 19 Post-reading Question:
Why do you think House has lost hope about having the game?
- Chapter 20 Post-reading Question:
What could House's betrayal be?
- Chapter 21 Post-reading Question:
How can a baseball game and a pageant be a symphony true?
- Chapter 22 Pre-reading Question:
Predict what Cleebo is going to do.
- Chapter 22 Post-reading Question:
Why do you think Cleebo says the things he does? How does it make House feel?
- Chapter 23 Pre-reading Question:
What will House say to the kids?
- Chapter 23 Post-reading Question:
What was Mr. Boyd's real treasure?
- Chapter 24 Pre-reading Question:
Do you think Frances will talk to her great-granddaddy about Mr. Boyd?
- Chapter 25 Pre-reading Question:
When you think about what really matters, what could Frances be talking about?
- Chapter 25 Post-reading Question:
How did Frances and House come to an agreement about the pageant and the game?
- Chapter 26 Pre-reading Question:
Who just made it in to town?
- Chapter 26 Post-reading Question:
How is House's mother "related" to Mr. Boyd?
- Chapter 27 Post-reading Question:
Do you think House hurt his elbow on purpose or was it an accident?
- Chapter 28 Pre-reading Question:
What will happen to the team if House can't pitch?
- Chapter 28 Post-reading Question:
How do Finesse and House come to an understanding? What do they learn about each other?
- Chapter 29 Post-reading Question:
Have you ever had to finish something you started, even if you didn't want to?
- Chapter 30 Pre-reading Question:
What did House's dad mean when he said that House had already won?
- Chapter 30 Post-reading Question:

Why do you think Cleebo encouraged House to play ball?
 Chapter 31 Post-reading Question:
 How did the children get the pageant and the ball game to work?
 Chapter 32 Pre-reading Question:
 Do you think House will be like Sandy Koufax and make it through the game?
 Why or why not?
 Chapter 33 Pre-reading Question:
 Will Cleebo's batting change things?
 Chapter 33 Post-reading Question:
 How does the team and Finesse help House rest?
 Why doesn't House just quite playing?
 Chapter 35 Pre-reading Question:
 Do you think the game is really over? Why or why not?
 Chapter 35 Post-reading Question:
 Why do you think Poppy stepped in to pinch hit?
 Chapter 36 Post-reading Question:
 Did you like how the book ended? Why or why not?

Language

Decompose pg. 5: To break down, rot
Kudzu pg. 6: An Asian vine that is a fast-growing weed
Brim pg. 14: The part of a hat that sticks out over the forehead
Creases pg. 40: line made on pants from ironing them
Rigorous pg. 45: Very strict schedule
Decaying pg. 67: Losing its strength and looks
Gloaming pg 94: Time before sunset or dusk
Exaggerations pg 129: To make something seem bigger than it really is
Verbosity pg. 149: Uses more words than are needed
Organic pg. 155: Parts that are related together
Eluded pg. 167: Avoided or escaped
Flurry pg. 190: A burst of activity
Marshaled pg. 208: To lead with ceremony
Obelisk pg. 213: A four-sided pillar that becomes narrower and skinner toward then top
Spontaneity pg. 216: Doing or saying something freely without planning it
 Language Arts: 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, 3.2.6, 3.3.1, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.8, 4.2.1, 4.2.9, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6, 4.3.7, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4
 Social Studies: 5.2.9, 5.3.3
 Science: 3.1.5, 5.1.6

Indiana Academic Standards

Anticipation Statements

Anticipation Guide

Before Reading		<u>The Aurora County All-Stars</u> By Deborah Wiles	After Reading	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		Baseball is a great sport.		
		Older people and little kids can be good friends.		
		People's nicknames always come from something true.		
		Good friends always keep other friends' secrets private.		

		Boys and girls should be on the same sports teams.		
		Boys can be good singers and dancers.		

**Read-Aloud
Passages**

The Aurora County All-Stars Read-Aloud Passages

By Deborah Wiles

PASSAGE ONE

Before Reading:

Prior to reading Chapter 3 of the book, I will read this section of Chapter 2 again. We will discuss the events from Chapter 1 and how the book has begun.

The Passage:

“Mr. Norwood Rhinehart Beauregard Boyd left behind a collection of black-and-white photographs, a library filled with musty books, and an ancient, pug-nosed, white dog named Eudora Welty. Later, when the long mystery that was Norwood Boyd unraveled and summer revealed its secrets, some folks would say it was the note that changed House’s life forever. Others would say it was the dog. But it was neither the note nor the dog.

It was the pageant.”

Chapter 2, page 9.

After Reading:

Do you notice how the author, Deborah Wiles, sets us up to start wondering about the pageant? House has just sat through watching his friend, Mr. Boyd, pass away. Would you think that would change House’s life more than the birthday pageant? The author wants us to start thinking about the pageant and how it is going to change House’s life. Let’s brainstorm a list of reasons how this pageant could change House’s life.

Why Passage Was Chosen:

This passage really makes the reader start thinking about what is going to happen next. I enjoy talking to my students about the possibilities, and having them honor and value other people’s ideas that are shared.

PASSAGE TWO

Before Reading:

Discuss with the class the life cycle, and how death is all a part of life.

The Passage:

“The very act of dying was so precious, so private. And, to tell the truth, a part of House wondered if he had somehow been summoned to keep watch with Norwood Boyd as the angels came to take him to heaven, in the same way he’d watched the angels come for his mother, six years ago.”

After Reading:

How do you think House feels about death? He has now been present when two people in his life died. Discuss at your table what House’s feelings are about dying.

Why Passage Was Chosen:

Death and the fear of death are big worries in children’s lives. This passage makes me think about the dignity that can accompany the rite of passing away. Reading this passage may alleviate some children’s fears about death and dying,

as House was not scared about it. He just felt that it was very private.
Chapter 16, page 105

Read Alikes

If you liked *The Aurora County All-Stars*, then you'll love...

- [Each Little Bird That Sings](#) by Deborah Wiles ~ This book is another smashing hit by Deborah Wiles. This story takes place in the same small county in Mississippi. Some of the characters from *The Aurora County All-Stars* appear in *Each Little Bird That Sings*. In addition, you'll get to know Comfort Snowberger and her family, who just happen to own the town's only funeral home.
- [Love, Ruby Lavender](#) by Deborah Wiles ~ If you find that you just can't get the characters of *Halleluia, Mississippi*, out of your mind, then this is the book for you! In this book, you will meet yet another of Deborah Wiles' funky-named characters, Ruby Lavender. Poor Ruby thinks she will be bored this summer while her grandmother is in Hawaii. But Ruby Lavender finds her own adventure.
- [Teammates](#) by Peter Golenbock ~ This picture book is all about when Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers. You can learn about the first African-American man to join the major leagues and how his teammates became a true team.
- [You Never Heard of Sandy Koufax?!](#) By Jonah Winter ~ This biography tells all about House Jackson's hero, Sandy Koufax. We know from *House* that Sandy Koufax played through pain, but in this biography you learn even more about him. You learn more about his career with the Brooklyn Dodgers, and learn that he ended up retiring at the peak of his baseball career.

Across the Curriculum Connections

Social Studies –

Students can use the website <http://www.biography.com/articles/Jackie-Robinson-9460813> to learn about Jackie Robinson's life. They may also use

Elizabeth Beardslee, Sunnyside Elementary School, elizabethbeardslee@msdl.k12.in.us

other resources available to them to find information about Jackie Robinson. After learning about his life, they will create a timeline with at least eight events (including dates of birth and death) from Jackie Robinson's life. This activity can be done independently or in pairs.

Indiana Academic Standards: 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 4.1.11, 4.1.15, 4.1.16, 5.1.17

Language Arts –

Children in class can visit the nearby nursing home to learn how to conduct an interview. Prior to visiting the nursing home, students will write an introduction about themselves, so they know what they will share with the older person. Then, students need to write a list of questions that they will ask their senior citizen when they arrive at the nursing home to interview them.

Indiana Academic Standards: 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.9, 3.4.5, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.4.9

**Book
Activities**

**Book Activities for The Aurora County All-Stars by
Deborah Wiles**

Activity 1: Letter to the Author

Students will individually write a letter to the author of the novel. In their letter, they will write at least one paragraph telling the author their thoughts about the book. The letters will then be mailed to the author's publisher in hopes of getting a response. If they wish, they can also include a picture with their letter.

Letter to the Author Rubric

Name _____ Date _____

As you write your letter, remember to include all of the important information in it. Check off each section below after you have completed it.

____ Heading

____ Salutation

____ Body

____ Closing

____ Signature

Indiana Academic Standards: 3.3.3, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.9, 3.4.4, 3.4.5, 3.4.6, 3.4.7, 3.4.8, 3.5.3, 3.5.4, 3.5.5, 3.5.7, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.5, 3.6.6, 3.6.7, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.4.11, 5.4.2, 5.4.11

Activity 2: Make a Game

Students will work in pairs to create a game using The Aurora County All-Stars. Students will use the guidelines below to make their games. The class will then spend time playing each other's games in class.

Game Guidelines

Use Post-It Notes to create the spaces on your game board. You and your partner will need to do the following:

1. The title of your game
2. The path of your game from Start to Finish
3. Game pieces
4. At least ten questions about the novel written on index cards. Remember, you must be able to answer all of the questions yourself if you are including them in your game!
5. You can add some spaces such as:
 - *Go ahead ___ spaces
 - *Take an extra turn
 - *Lose your next turn
 - *Go back ___ spaces
 - *Switch places with another player
6. Make your game as colorful, interesting, and fun as you can! Neatness counts!

Indiana Academic Standards: 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, 3.2.6, 3.2.7, 3.3.1,

3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.6, 3.3.8, 3.4.1, 3.4.6, 3.5.4, 3.5.5, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.5, 3.6.7, 3.6.8

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Official Website of Author Deborah Wiles: www.deborahwiles.com

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<http://www.wordcentral.com/home.html>

Perma-Bound <http://www.perma-bound.com/ViewDetail/19252-aurora-county-all-stars>

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