



A Yellow Raft in Blue Water: A Novel

By Michael Dorris

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A Yellow Raft in Blue Water: A Novel By Michael Dorris

Michael Dorris has crafted a fierce saga of three generations of Indian women, beset by hardships and torn by angry secrets, yet inextricably joined by the bonds of kinship. Starting in the present day and moving backward, the novel is told in the voices of the three women: fifteen-year-old part-black Rayona; her American Indian mother, Christine, consumed by tenderness and resentment toward those she loves; and the fierce and mysterious Ida, mother and grandmother whose haunting secrets, betrayals, and dreams echo through the years, braiding together the strands of the shared past.

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A Yellow Raft in Blue Water: A Novel By Michael Dorris Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Veteran narrator Rosenblat displays remarkable vocal versatility in narrating Dorris's cross-generational story of three Native American women in Montana who must come to grips with the past. Divided into three first-person narratives, the book follows teenage Rayona; her mother, Christine; and her grandmother, who both the others call Aunt Ida. Rosenblat gives each a distinct voice, perfectly capturing the youthful yet determined attitude of Rayona and the wizened, sardonic tone of her mother. The syncopated, husky voice she adopts for Aunt Ida, who is said to have a pronounced accent, isn't spot-on, but it isn't distracting either. Ida's story is the shortest of the three, and Rayona's is the longest and most immediate, as the other two are actually monologues that supplement and expand on the events of the first part of the book. Rosenblat ably gives voice to the secondary characters, switching easily from a chummy, awkward priest to the bullying young Foxy Cree, but it is her excellent portrayal of dopey, sweet Sky and world-wise Evelyn, a couple who take in Rayona when she runs away, that serves as an index to the overall quality of this laudable production.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 7 Up—Michael Dorris's first novel (Turtleback, 1987) comes to life in this fully voiced reading by Barbara Rosenblat. At 15, Rayona is left by her Native-American mother shortly after her African-American father walks out of their lives again, and this time probably forever. Rayona tries to tolerate life with her grandmother, known by all as Aunt Ida, but when the mission priest sexually harasses this tough but insightful young woman, she leaves the reservation and finds her way into a new life in a Montana state park. After a few weeks' idyll as a maintenance worker sheltered by former hippies, Rayona returns to her mother, Christine. The narrative switches to become an account of how Christine came to be the person Rayona has known. Aunt Ida raised Christine on the reservation, along with Christine's younger brother Lee. Lee's best friend, Dayton, plays a significant role in Christine's life right through the time of Rayona's return years later, but Lee dies as a youth in Vietnam. In the novel's final movement, Aunt Ida's brief but substantial story unfolds [...] Rosenblat gives each of these women—ranging in age from youth through old age—a strength of voice that matches their strengths of character. The symbol of the philandering priest is unfortunately resonant now, but the novel's highly developed iconography of color and elemental forces continues to stand as a literature teacher's friend. Dorris' work lends itself particularly well to oral delivery, and this production is stellar.

Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA

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From Library Journal

A powerful novel of three generations of American Indian women, each seeking her own identity while forever cognizant of family responsibilities, loyalty, and love. Rayona, half-Indian half-black daughter of Christine, reacts to feelings of rejection and abandonment by running away, not knowing that her mother had acted in a similar fashion some 15 years before. But family ties draw Rayona home to the Montana reservation as they drew Christine, and as they had drawn Ida many years earlier. As the three recount their lives, often repeating incidents but adding new perspectives, a total picture emerges. The result is a beautifully passionate first novel reminiscent of Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*, but a strong work which should be read and enjoyed for its own merits. Highly recommended. Thomas L. Kilpatrick, Southern Illinois Univ. Lib., Carbondale

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jason Hill:

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Susan Arnold:

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